

I told someone this week, I'm not sure how you stumble into a series on Revelation but somehow we did just that. This morning we're in Revelation 14. Last Sunday we had an amazing service with our students leading us in worship and the kids singing and Pastor Jeff preaching an excellent word about scars. But the two weeks before that were spent talking about dragons and beasts and the mark he places on those who identify with him. Today we get to talk again about angels and the Lamb and the redeemed. It's a much better chapter. All along I've been telling you – keep your eyes on the Lamb, find the Lamb, if you get confused in the book look for the Lamb. In chapter 13, John looks and sees **“another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.” Revelation 13:11** The beast was a poor imitation of the Lamb. He looked sorta like one, but as soon as he opened his mouth it was obvious – something is wrong. This doesn't sound right. This doesn't sound like truth. Remember the sheep know the voice of the Shepherd and Jesus is both the Good Shepherd and the Lamb who was slain. So John sees this fake lamb and knows – nope, you're not The Lamb. But, in chapter 14, John says, **“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. 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. 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. 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. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.” Revelation 14:1-5**

Two weeks ago Pastor said you aren't going to be tricked into taking the mark of the beast. Here's why. Because those who have been redeemed know the difference between the sound of the dragon and the sound of victory. New songs were often written and sung in the Old Testament after a battle had been won. Miriam writes a new song of praise when they cross the Red Sea. Deborah and Barak write and sing a new song to celebrate the victory over the enemy. We recognize the song those of us who have been redeemed from the curse of sin by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - it's a song of victory - a song of celebration - a song that signals we've overcome. We recognize the song because it's the song we're singing. We, in Christ, through Christ, sing a song of victory and a song of the redeemed. We know to keep our eyes fixed on the Lamb and we recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd. We're following the Lamb wherever He goes and we aren't getting distracted by beasts or dragons or pseudo lambs.

Too often we read the book of Revelation and we get distracted by all the crazy sights and descriptions. Ooh, dragons. But, I'm telling you and I'll keep telling you - just find the Lamb. Here's the thing. When John sees the Lamb He's standing on Mount Zion. John and all of his original readers knew exactly what he was saying because every Jew knew that Psalm 2 was about the prophesied Messiah. **“Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, “Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.” The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, “I have installed**

**my king on Zion, my holy mountain.” Psalm 2:1-6** In essence John sees that the Lamb has become the King of all Kings. The sounds of heaven and the sights of the throne room are all there – these are the things we’ve been hearing and seeing every time the Lamb is at the center – the roar of rushing water, peals of thunder, harps and music – all of creation is represented, all of God’s people – remember we’ve seen this 144,000 before – they’re the great multitude from chapter 7 made up of every nation, tribe, color, people, and language – they’re the ones crying out salvation belongs to our God – and it’s why they alone can sing the song of the redeemed. They aren’t worried about dragons and beasts they’re just keeping their eyes fixed on the Lamb and following Him wherever He goes. The King of Kings reigns. He’s been installed as King by the Almighty God. He’s not elected, He’s appointed and He reigns forever. Don’t get distracted by dragons and beasts – don’t get distracted by empire and power, don’t get distracted by anything that will pull your attention away from the Lamb. We spend a lot of time worrying about the mark of the beast and identifying the dragons and beasts of our time – but where’s the Lamb? He’s standing on Mount Zion – presiding over all the earth as King. Fix your eyes on Him and follow Him wherever He leads you.

There is a real enemy of our souls. We can’t completely ignore the beasts and dragons. The Apostle Paul cleared up any confusion we might have about who the enemy is when he wrote to the Ephesians – the enemy isn’t flesh and blood – in other words it’s not each other – but there are rulers, authorities and spiritual forces of evil that all operate in spiritual realms. The enemy is calling out for our attention – wanting us to be distracted by the wrong things and take our eyes off of Jesus. He’s looking for those who will defile themselves and live contrary to God’s word. The Lamb on the other hand is looking for

those who will keep themselves pure. So verse 4 says those singing the song of the redeemed are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure...no lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. Let's unpack that a bit because this idea of 144,000 virgins gets some weird airtime.

Once again we come back to this idea of literal or figurative. Here's the background we need. Throughout the Scripture one of the major metaphors used is that of marriage. It becomes a living drama depicting the relationship of God and Israel and then Jesus and the Church. The Old Testament prophets use this metaphor a lot. For instance, Ezekiel describes God seeing Israel and choosing her. She was sort of a mess when God found her so He took her and cleaned her, washing her, gave her beautiful garments to wear and entered into a marriage covenant with her and Israel, the prophet says, became His. But, then the prophet Hosea gives us another picture of the way Israel was not faithful to her husband, God. Instead she committed adultery by going after foreign gods and serving them instead. In the drama of marriage that is helping us understand the relationship of God and Israel her sins include adultery, but because she is adulterous with other gods it's seen as a form of idolatry. This gets a bit confusing but the point is that when talking about Israel adultery and idolatry are very much intertwined and this is why. One sin is literal – Israel literally commits the sin of idolatry by worshipping things other than God Almighty and one sin is figurative – the nation of Israel as a whole has committed adultery because in the great drama that helps us understand the relationship Israel has cheated on her husband, God Almighty. Later on in the New Testament you'll often find these 2 sins – adultery and idolatry intertwined – and this is why.

So, Israel has cheated on God and gone after foreign gods, has not obeyed God's commands, and has defiled herself by not remaining pure and separate from the peoples around her. When God had set the laws for the nation of Israel and had met with Moses and wrote down the commands that fill the books of Exodus and Leviticus He said over and over – come out from the people in the land I'm giving you and be holy as I am holy. Remaining pure and set apart was a big thing. They were not supposed to live like the cultures around them. Everyone else is doing – fill in the blank sin – but you're not because you're mine and I have a better way for you so come out from them and live differently and be holy as I am holy. But, Israel failed. She broke the covenant God had made with her so God sent Israel into exile. She was punished for her sins of real idolatry and adultery in the great drama. But, the prophet Jeremiah let us know that God was not finished with Israel. No, no. God still cared so deeply for His people and He longed to bring Israel back. Jeremiah said God would once again be Israel's God and would bring them back. **"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. I will build you up again, and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful...There will be a day when watchmen cry out...'Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.'" Jeremiah 31:3-4, 6** God would redeem Israel and cleanse her of all her sins and she would again be called Virgin Israel when she presented herself to the King on Mount Zion. That's the goodness of our God. Who forgives and redeems and restores.

Then we get to the New Testament and the Apostle Paul carries on this metaphor of marriage to show us the way that Christ loves His church – He loves us the way husbands love their wives. But, Paul also intends to present the church to Christ. Paul wrote to the

Corinthians, **“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” 2 Corinthians**

**11:2** Paul is acting as the father presenting the bride, the church, to Jesus the groom. In Ephesians we’re told that Christ is returning for a bride – which is us, the church – who is without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless. So the ideas of marriage and virginity have been weaved throughout Scripture. They’ve been used figuratively like in the grand drama to show us the relationship of how God loved Israel and how Christ loved the church and they’ve been used literally. So our own marriages reflect this great drama. It means Christian marriages have a huge responsibility because the world should be able to look at your marriage and the way in which you treat each other and think – wow, that’s how Jesus loves me. And, this great drama involves single people because it means we too play a part in the grand drama. Outside of marriage our relationships are to remain pure because we exemplify the church Christ is returning for in the future. Single lives point to the end of this age when the marriage drama gets played out and there’s a great wedding that takes place in Revelation 21 and Christ dwells with us forever and we have no other needs. This means that there is a huge responsibility for Christian singles because the world should be able to look at my life and the way I live and think – wow, that’s what it means to find sufficiency in Christ.

We return to Revelation 14 and find these virgins among the crowd of the redeemed – these who have not defiled themselves, who have not pledged allegiance to the beast, who have remained pure in the way they lived in the world, they kept their eyes on the Lamb, they followed Him alone, they didn’t look at things that would lead to sin, they didn’t cheat on their God, they didn’t replace Him with something else they decided was more

important to live for, worship, or die for, they didn't lie, or steal, they lived differently than the culture around them. They set themselves apart to serve Jesus. Are they literal or figurative? Israel was both and judgment came in the form of exile to Babylon. Judgment will come to the church as well – will we be found living lives that are pure before the Lord? Either way the lesson we learn is to keep ourselves pure and not be defiled by the world so that we can sing the song of the redeemed.

Then, John, looks and sees angels who give a series of commands and proclamations all of which will help us live pure lives. The angels come with the eternal gospel in hand – they proclaim good news.

**Angel 1: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”**

Honor God with your life – with your words, emotions, actions, bodies, choices. Worship Him and give Him the glory He is due. Worship the Lord in every aspect of your life. And, here's the best bit – that beast John saw coming out of the sea and the beast he saw come out of the earth who led people astray to worship them – yeah, that's crazy. How about we worship the God who made the earth and the sea! Worship Him because He alone deserves the glory! By giving our worship to God alone we keep our lives pure.

**Angel 2: Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.**

Remember Babylon is where the people of Israel went in exile and punishment. I told you adultery and idolatry are intertwined in the Old Testament. But, the angel announces – Babylon has fallen. It didn't last. The kingdoms of this world will crumble. The only kingdom that remains in the King standing on Mount Zion.

**Angel 3: Announces a warning for those who would worship the beast instead of the Lamb.**

The announcements taken together remind us – don't defile ourselves by seeking the wrong kingdom, by serving the wrong god, by going after the wrong powers, or by following the pseudo lamb. Keep yourselves pure by worshipping the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings, by keeping your eyes fixed on the Lamb, and by following Him wherever He goes.

What does that mean to follow the Lamb wherever He goes?

**Following the Lamb means daily taking up your cross.** In Matthew 16 Jesus paints a picture of discipleship. Here's the thing – salvation is a free gift. You can't earn salvation. Jesus died for you and you freely accept His forgiveness, His grace, and His mercy. But, discipleship will cost you everything. Here's what Jesus said it would cost, **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done."** Matthew 16:24-27 In 2022, the idea of telling ourselves no – of denying ourselves something we want or that will make us happy seems almost as absurd as a story about beasts and dragons. But this is what Jesus said. We'll die to ourselves and take up a cross in order to follow Him.

**Following the Lamb means sometimes saying no so we can say yes.** Where is the Lamb going? This is the question we need to ask ourselves. Is the Lamb going to this job or that



one? Is the Lamb leading me to this relationship and this person for marriage? Is the Lamb leading me to this calling or vocation or opportunity? We studied in Ephesians 5 last Wednesday where Paul says find out what pleases the Lord. What is the Lord asking of you? Find out. Discipleship isn't all hardship. My yes to serving Jesus meant saying no to certain things, behaviors, lifestyles. I knew as a teenager I was called to ministry and that informed all my choices and decisions. In my 20's I knew God had called me to be single – that's not a calling the church talks about much. But, my yes to serve Jesus single has led to me to travel the world, to be set in families on the other side of the ocean, to have the privilege to study and meet people from different walks of life. I took up my cross and never looked back and my yes to following the Lamb wherever He leads has been an amazing journey. Where is the Lamb leading you? Say yes to following Him wherever He wants to take you.

**Following the Lamb means fixing your eyes on Him.** That phrase brings us to Hebrews 12 which first reminds us there's a great cloud of witnesses cheering us on to keep following the Lamb – it's the 144,000 already around the throne – it's the generation above you – it's the people in this church – look around you. Take a minute – just look – see the people who are a different age than you – we're all living for Jesus in different seasons. We've experienced different challenges and moments but we're still running the race – and we're cheering each other on. And then Hebrews 12 says, **“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” Hebrews 12:1b-2** That race marked out for you is wherever the Lamb is leading you but the only way you'll get to the finish line is to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus

and to keep running in the direction He's taking you. But, sometimes we need some encouragement. Turn to someone and say – I'm cheering you on. You can make it.

**Following the Lamb means imitating the Lamb. "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."**

**1 Peter 2:21** He's set an example for us to follow. Ephesians 5 says we should be imitators of God in how we live. Watch the Lamb – how does He talk to people in Scripture? Then talk like that – with kindness and compassion and love. How does Jesus treat others? Do that. That whole What Would Jesus Do – you know that's based on a book. I had to read it in middle school. It's a story that was first written in 1896 about a pastor and his congregation who would challenge themselves for a whole year to apply that question – what would Jesus do – to every decision they made. In the story the whole small town was impacted as a result. The book's author, Charles Sheldon, was himself a pastor. He would write one chapter of the book each week and read it to his own congregation and discuss it. The story was picked up by magazines and went around the world challenging people to reorder the way they lived their lives. It was a revolutionary idea to truly live like Jesus in every area and situation of their lives. This is what it means to imitate the Lamb. To ask ourselves how would Jesus respond? What decision would Jesus make? How would Jesus take care of this problem?

This is what it means to follow the Lamb wherever He goes – take up your cross, say no so you can say yes in obedience, fix your eyes, and imitate Him.

There's one last piece to this chapter. After this John looks and sees essentially what Jesus had said in Matthew 16 – the son of man coming in His Father's glory with the angels. They begin to reap the harvest of the earth. Pastor has quoted our friend Bryan Davenport many

times when he said “ripe for harvest and ripe for judgment smell the same.” In this passage we get 2 pictures:

**Angel 4: “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”** And the earth was harvested.

**Angel 5: “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because it’s grapes are ripe.”** The grapes were thrown into the winepress of God’s wrath. The treading of grapes and the winepress imagery is always a sign of judgment in Scripture. **“They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press.” Revelation 14:20** There was a harvest – and it seems it was a separation of the righteous and the unrighteous. Judgment came for those who had not followed the Lamb and harvest came for those who had remained pure.

But, I don’t want you to worry that it’s all random or that it can’t be done. That you can’t live a holy and pure life. That you can’t run the race or follow the Lamb. That it’s all too much or too complicated or you’ll never make it. So one last time – where’s the Lamb?

Because judgment comes outside the city but there was a Lamb who also bore the wrath of God for all humanity outside the city in order to make us pure and holy and restore us. To cleanse us of all our sins and mistakes and transgressions. In the same way that God called Israel back after she had defiled herself and then declared her to be His – His Virgin Israel, so God saw His people in their sins and sent His Son Jesus to die as a sinless lamb. **“And so Jesus suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.**

**Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.” Hebrews 13:12-13** Jesus has already taken our place and bore our disgrace, taken the judgement that should have been ours, His blood has already been spilled outside the city. That’s the

goodness of our God who always makes a way. For those who have gone to Him and found forgiveness He's removed our sin and put His name on our forehead. I belong to Jesus. I am His and He is mine. He has been crowned King forever and I'll follow Him wherever He goes.

Let's pray.