

Revelation 14—Whose Mark Will You Bear?

Introduction

My fellow lecturer Dennis did a great job last week explaining that the Cross stands against the Beast. The path of the cross that the Lamb embodies as a kinsman-redeemer is opposed to the Beast's worship of materialism and self-centeredness.

Today I want to camp on the work that has been already done and ***make the plain things the main things, and the main things the plain things***. Here they are:

1) on life's cafeteria line you get two entrees, nothing more: God or the Devil. You can either choose the mark of the Beast or the mark of Jesus;

2) Life isn't what it seems on the surface; in fact we live in an Enchanted world of spiritual powers operating behind the surfaces of our senses. These powers occupy eternal time and spaces bigger than what we can wrap our minds around.

3) As Christians we are called to be incredibly joyful, absolutely fearless, and constantly in trouble.

The marks we choose.

We can fear God, or fear everything else but Him. We choose His mark or the Beast's:

The spiritual powers at work on this earth and the worlds around us, now and eternally:

These marks define our allegiance in a great spiritual warfare that happens in this world and many others as we speak. The Beast, the False Prophet, the Anti-Christ—all are real and embedded into our political, social, and economic structures:

Genocide in Darfur,

apartheid in South Africa or Kashmir or India,

the \$52B porn industry (more lucrative than all the major sports franchises put together, more lucrative than all the major broadcasting networks combined),

drug lords in Mexico:

all are evidence of the powers and principalities behind the scenes as they pull our strings and influence the Enchanted world in which we live. This **is** an enchanted

world: what you see isn't what you get. Appearances belie realities. Satan and his mafia are real, malevolent, insidious, seductive, seditious—like a luminous web shimmering just back of the surface edges of what we can see and apprehend with our senses.

We shouldn't go to an extreme here and deny all human choice. We all still choose. I don't believe, for ex, that there is a goblin under every rock. All governments and social networks are not bad. They were originally designed to be instruments of a theocracy and point back to one Person: Jesus Christ. When they do not point us to Jesus and work toward advancing His kingdom on earth, then they are co-opted, hijacked and they become puppets of the powers of this world, and the many worlds around us.

Today's choices matter for not just now, but for eternity. Let me help you and me try to wrap our brains around this degree of scale. Eternity. Here is a rope. The guys in my small group are holding it around the room (hold it up now guys). Can you see it as it heads out the door? Can you imagine I am holding a rope that goes all the way around the room, out the door, around the property once or twice, then across the street, around CSUF, then around Fullerton, around the state of California, and then up north around the country, and on around the globe. But the part I am holding here, the beginning, this six inches of it, that is the rest of your life on earth. This is your life. The rest is what remains once you leave this earth.

As a psychologist we sometimes look at your past as a motivator. Personally, as a psychologist I prefer to be motivated by my future. There's a lot more of it to consider!

I'm also motivated by issues of time but also space. Have you considered lately how much bigger the world is than the postage stamp size place in which I live and move. Have you considered lately that this Earth revolves around the Sun at a speed of about 18.5 miles/sec . In this orbit, we (and the rest of the Solar System) are traveling at a velocity of about 155 miles/sec . Our solar system is a tiny part along an outer spiral arm of The Milky Way. This Milky Way Galaxy is moving about 185 miles/sec (300 km/sec). So here we are clinging like ants to a blindingly fast moving speck of sand blitzing who knows where into a void bigger than we can wrap our minds around.

So, back to my point, after our detour around the heavens. Another perspective is to think of our existence on this rapidly moving planet in this speeding solar system within this blitzing galaxy as a movie. And guess what? It's not about you. It's about that One who was there before, during, and after the creation of this planet. We come into this movie toward the end. We're in a crowd scene. It's a big crowd, for example, maybe 144,000 people in it, more or less in this one scene. As the camera sweeps across

the crowd, you can see the back of your head for 2/5ths of a second. But you are excited about that. I mean, after all, it's your life. So you rent a theatre and invite all your family and friends to come and see this movie about you. Here you are in this slide, toward the back. See? Back there on the 2000th row. That head. Yeah, that's you.

That's a little ridiculous, huh? We would never **THINK** we would do something that stupid. But, fellow pilgrims, face it, that's how we act most of the time. That's how we live our lives in this Orange County existence of big cars, houses, botox, shrinking 201K's, and striving after stuff. We live for this two inches of rope. We think it's our movie, not by the way we think so much as the way we live. Our brains think about 60 to 70 thousand thoughts a day according to some of my fellow psychologists. 99% of them are more or less what we thought yesterday. I think of this as our monkey brain. Chattering away. Looking at the shiny new Lexus. Watch me do tricks for bits of approval or love. Let me pick your nits. You pick mine. Biology determines destiny here in an unimaginative world that is limited to our little plot of ground.

Folks, there's nothing wrong with this pet money locked in our heads, but let's not let him or her run our lives. We are on a great, sweeping journey of the most serious sort. He or she's a cute monkey. But he is not to be in the driver's seat. So we turn to another part of you, that part of you that is a devoted follower of Jesus-- or you wouldn't be here tonight. Let's focus with that part of ourselves, with our spiritual brain, not our monkey brain. Focus on what matters, not what chatters. And one of the big things that deserves our focus is how resilient we are now and how we will be in the day of trouble or trial. During these times of trouble, present or future, what counts is our walk more than our talk:

If I let my chattering, materialistic self sit in the driver's seat of my car while my spiritual self is in the trunk, then I walk through the world as an enemy of the cross, not a friend. I say yes to Jesus with my words, but yes to the world and the gods of my appetite, with my actions. Folks, Satan employs friends of Christ to execute his dark designs. Judas was close to Jesus. He healed and brought people back to life in Jesus name. He managed Christ's money for him. And Satan would rather gain one person, like you or me, who belongs to this inner circle of believers, than a thousand who are confessed as followers of the Beast.

Phillippians 3:¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many **live** as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by

the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Joyful, fearless, and in constant trouble

This passage in Revelation 14 is full of suffering—both for those who have the mark of the Savior and those who have the mark of the Beast. I don't read here of folks who fall in the middle. I think it's an either-or. That is then; this is now. What mark do you carry secretly or publically? Do you, in your behavior, bow before Jesus' cross of sacrifice or before the materialism of the Beast?

The remaining part of this chapter deals with suffering, persecution, and the manner in which we respond to hardship. Other folks in other countries pave the way for us. They are great role models for us in terms of enduring, adapting, and worshipping joyfully in the midst of persecution. They are readying their hearts for the testing times to come. For the Beast.

Persecution in the world around us.

According to the World Christian Encyclopedia there are about 1.9/6.4 billion people in the world today who identify themselves loosely as Christians. That's about 33% of the population of the planet. Of this 1.9B, about a third (650M) care enough about their faith to spread it—they are called the Great Commission Christians. Of this number of Great Commission Christians, a little more than half, or 350M Christians, face discrimination of some kind (for example, economic, ethnic cleansing, or governmental policy discrimination).

Furthermore, 200M Christians face violence today because of their faith. That's about 2/3rds of the 306,003,607 population of the United States that today, across the world, is subject to violence because of their faith. They are experiencing a small form of the winepress of bloody persecution. But this is just a foretaste of the winepress of God's own judgment and wrath depicted in this chapter:

Do you really believe in the Devil? According to current surveys a little more than half of evangelical Christians do not believe in a real devil, but rather see Satan as a symbol for evil. 48% of evangelicals think Satan is a real entity. Half of us agree with Jesus. He took Satan seriously. The other half think of him as a cute little red horned guy with a pitchfork, like in this picture. If we took him seriously we would be getting out spiritual warfare skills and tools up to speed, and quick.

Persecution in the world within us.

As real as Satan is within and behind the scenes of politics, education, and the media, a more present and subversive form of the Devil is within us. He lies ceaselessly

in our own minds. We believe him constantly. He says: “Be afraid. Be very fearful for your future, your money, your relationships, your life and your coming death.” The key element he wishes to induce within us is FEAR. There’s just two emotions from which all others come: love and fear. Jesus=love. Satan=fear. Simple. Remember it.

Fighting interior persecution readies us for persecution outside of us. First we learn to fight lies within, then we can be more effective warriors against lies without. The one truth we must hold onto, more than all others, is that God is impossibly in love with us more than we can love our very own selves. If we remember this then we can fight political, economic, and other Beastly fears as in the day of Anti-Christ (Rev 13:17)?

First, in this day of relative ease, we must grapple and grasp grace, this one-way love from God. We first must believe God’s love doesn’t depend on us but rather it depends on Him from his own free will. Once we do this then we can have a fighting chance to grab a hold of enough truth to be strong for Jesus in the face of marketplace persecution or prejudice in the political public square.

The Love of Jesus Sustains Us:

This brings me back to the original statement I made, which is the one I wish you to remember from this little talk. Fear God or fear everyone else. Believe you are desperately loved by God and you will not be desperate in any other situation. Fellow Christians, **believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts**. The persecution and suffering which is now, and which is to come, pales in comparison to the steady, warm, pulsating love of Jesus for you personally. Let me give you an example from a great man in history.

Blaise Pascal, 17th century mathematician, scientist, writer, father of modern computer, master of French prose. When he was 31 he sewed into his jacket, a parchment. He kept it till the end of his life 8 years later at age 39, moving it from coat to coat:

*“the year of grace, 1654, Monday, 23rd Nov, from about half past ten in the evening till about half past midnight: **Fire**. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not of the philosophers and intellectuals—Certitude. Certitude. Feelings of joy, peace; the God of Jesus Christ, my God and your God, forgetfulness of the world and everything but God. Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy, the fountain of living water, Jesus Christ. May I never be separated from Him.”*

He experienced the presence of Christ in his coat, sewn into this and that coat, not because God was inconstant, but because he was. Not because God withdrew from

Pascal, but Pascal knew he was prone to withdraw from God. We too have to sew reminders into our lives of the Holy Spirit's Fire. The Truth on fire will give us joy.

Jonathan Edwards, one of the great Puritan fathers of the church in this country, wrote in his diary: "Once as I rode out in the woods to walk for prayer I had a moment that was extraordinary of the glory of the son of God in his wonderful, great, sweet, and pure love. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and all conception. It continued for about an hour as best as I can tell. Which kept me in the greater part of time in a flood of tears weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul that I know not how to express: emptied, annihilated, laying in the dust, and full of Christ alone."

These principalities and powers are very real, not designed in some Disney studio. Yet Victor Christus reigns. Over all else: Beast, Anti-Christ, False Prophet, and lesser powers of the evil Mafia that cruises around the world today--the Cross of Christ is victorious.

The sacrificial Lamb instructs us, models for us, the sacrificial servant leadership, the meekness of restrained courage that is needed in these days of interior and exterior persecution.

The victorious, judging, Christ as Judge and Jury of all creation or the quiet humble Christ-the-Lamb. Christ the Judge; Christ the Lamb—both are seen in this chapter. Both examples are needed if we are to discern and engage the demons and angels that influence the Enchanted World in which we live.

"Lord Jesus, encourage us to let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also. The body they may kill. Your truth abideth still. Unveil our eyes to discern what is real and what is not. Unveil our wills to grapple with persecution without and within. I pray that each person here would be strengthened with power through your Spirit in their inner being so that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith. I pray that we would securely rest our trust not in our 2/5ths of a second on the world stage, or the 2 inches or rope that is allotted to us on the clock, but in the prevailing, powerful presence of the Person of Jesus. Amen."