

Revelation 14

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[0 : 00] In week one I talked about how the fear of the Lord often really means fear. And last week we talked about how the fear of God should transform our fears as those who believe in Him.

! Why we should fear the Lord. And tonight we are going to think on why the world should fear the Lord. And it seems to me over the course of this summer and the course of these three weeks, the more I thought about it, the more I realised that I've begun barely to scratch the surface of this topic. There's so much more that could be said on the fear of the Lord. And the Bible is full of it, if I can say that. And it should be mine for treasures. And I think it's one of those themes that as you begin to read the Bible through this lens of the fear of the Lord, you see it more and more and more. And what I've done these last three weeks is not a comprehensive subject. There's a PhD to be written or a book to be written. And I want to encourage you to keep thinking about it this week, to keep looking at the fear of the Lord. Really all I've done is look at it from three different angles. So tonight, Revelation 14. Last Sunday night, if you remember that, I began my talk by reflecting that there is so much fear in the world. And so much fear. Well, I ended last week suggesting that the solution to all our fears is, biblically speaking, not less fear, but more fear.

[1 : 19] More of the right kind of fear, the fear of the Lord. And so I want to begin tonight by saying, when it comes to this kind of fear in the world that we live in, there is just so little of it.

There is nowhere near enough trembling before God. There is nowhere near enough awe for God and respect for God. And appreciation of God's power and majesty and holiness. In the world that you and I live in, there is so little fear of the Lord. So little. And so it has always been. Because in history, when God's people have looked out on the world in which they live, this is what they've seen.

The very first time that the fear of the Lord is mentioned in the Bible is by Abraham in Genesis 20 and verse 11. Listen to what Abraham says to himself as he thinks about his new neighbours in a place called Gerar.

There is surely no fear of God in this place. Go forward to the next book. Go to Exodus, when Moses is pleading with Pharaoh to let God's people go with visit after visit after visit to the royal court.

[2 : 23] And according to Exodus 9.29, Moses said to him, as soon as I've gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord. The thunder will cease and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's.

But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord's God. And so it goes on. Through the Bible. So it's no surprise when you come to Romans chapter 3, where Paul summarizes, doesn't he, the human condition, with a withering selection of Old Testament passages that are strung together so that you and I have painted a picture of what human beings are like by nature.

And listen to how he concludes. None is righteous, no, not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God, all have turned aside. Together they have become worthless, no one does good, not even one.

Their throat is an open grieve, they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

In their paths are ruin and misery. And the way of peace they have not known. And the summary is, there is no fear of God before their eyes. Now surely that is as true today as when it was when Paul wrote it 2,000 years ago.

[3 : 41] It is as true in our place as it is in any place. There is no fear of God before their eyes. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

And yet there needs to be. In fact what the world needs is more wisely to fear the Lord. And what I want to do this evening by reflecting on the Bible as a whole, but particularly holding in on Revelation 14, is trying to teach that.

Revelation 14, I don't know whether you picked it up as it was read, is a very stark picture of two very distinct groups of people. Two groups of people. At kind of, at opposite ends of this huge chasm that God has established in eternity.

So in Revelation 14 you deal with the redeemed. And in Revelation 14 you deal with the fate of those who in the language of Revelation 14 are the harvested. Which is those who fall under the wrath of God.

The passage starts with redemption. And it ends with harvest. And in the middle part we hear the message of the angels. God's messengers.

[4 : 47] And so I want to take the three sections. I want to deal with the start and then the end and then the middle. You'll see why I hope later. So let's begin with the redeemed in verses 1 to 5. And again we're introduced to the 144,000.

That is a symbolic number. It is a number in the book of Revelation that is symbolic. It represents all of God's people. And these are those that verse 1 says have the Father's name.

And the name of the Lord Jesus Christ written on their foreheads. And that is how John sees them in his vision. And that seal stands in direct contrast to the mark of the beast.

Which others have on their foreheads or on their hands. In John's vision each human being has one seal or another. It is how he distinguishes who people belong to.

And he makes it very clear to us that the redeemed belong to Jesus and they are with the Lamb.

And whatever else we want to say about heaven and what it will be like. This is plainly the best thing isn't it? Whatever else we might anticipate with regards to heaven, with some hope.

[5 : 50] This is to be looked forward to above all else. We will be with Jesus. The one we've loved but never seen. The one who gave himself for us but we've never thanked him face to face.

The one who when he walked the earth blessed everyone he came into contact with. The one to whom we owe an eternity of praise. And that is precisely why we find them singing. And they are singing.

The redeemed are singing because their hearts are filled with delight to be in the presence of Jesus. And we are told that they are singing a new song. New because this is a new day.

And Christ is on his throne. For all people to see. And yet you notice in the opening paragraph it is only the followers of Jesus who sing this song. They are the only ones who know the words. This is privileged singing.

And when this day comes even though everyone will see this is the right thing to do. This is what only some will be able to do. As in verse 4 and 5 tells us that these redeemed singers are also the blameless people.

[6 : 55] They have not defiled themselves with women. I think this is a metaphor for spiritual faithfulness as opposed to spiritual adultery. These are the people who didn't cheat on God.

By worshipping something else or someone else. They were true to him. They were loyal. And in verse 5 we are told that they didn't lie. They didn't lie. They were people of faithfulness in speech. In people's lives they were blameless. It doesn't mean that they never sinned. It simply means that they cannot be a case of betrayal. They did an unblemished record of loyalty to Jesus.

And in verse 4 it says they follow the lamb wherever he goes. And the final thing we are told about them is they are verse 4 at the end. They are the redeemed. They are the redeemed.

They have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the lamb. These who are people who were bought by the lamb and by his blood. So that they might be rescued from the earth. They might be plucked out from among other men and women and devoted to his son.

[7 : 57] This is ultimately what distinguishes. These people from other men and women. It's not something that they have done is it? Do you notice it is something that God has done.

It is something that the lamb has done on their behalf. By the lamb's blood. These people have been bought for God. They have been purchased. They have been redeemed that they might live for him. And that is a wonderful picture.

And it's all the more wonderful when you come to learn it's a picture of you. In fact when we come to see ourselves in these verses it's hard not to weep for joy I think.

Or at least it ought to be hard. And part of the joy of course is that we no longer need to fear God's wrath. And that is something very significant in the Bible.

It keeps telling us doesn't it? About the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord's judgment is a fear that only some people need to have. And this is a picture for those who have been redeemed from that fear.

[8 : 55] And it's redemption from that fear. Which causes many to say. That for Christians when we read the Bible. Fear doesn't really mean fear. There is something right when people say that.

If all we meant by that was fear of God's wrath or God's judgment. Well there's absolutely no need for redeemed people to fear the Lord.

It's what 1 John 4 verse 18 means. When it says perfect love casts out fear. That is indeed something to rejoice in. Christians should never fear the wrath of God. Sadly you and I know Christians.

Many who do. Sometimes Satan tricks us into doubting that Jesus mercy could really be this good. But it is this good. And Satan is a liar. And when it comes to the wrath of God.

God's perfect love drives out fear. Those who are redeemed from his judgment. They are fearless. At least in this sense. But as I've been arguing through the series.

[9 : 58] Fear of God's judgment is not the only fear that there is. So there is a right fear of God. That even Christians carry around in their hearts. And far from being at odds with God's grace.

The Bible tells us that this fear is actually produced by God's grace. Do you understand that? Now if you haven't followed me so far. I'll make it a bit more clear.

Let me point you to a psalm. That will stretch your mind. And widen your heart. It's done that for me. Now think about Psalm 130. Let me just read you the first four verses of Psalm 130.

He says this. Now if that text doesn't make you reconsider.

What it means to fear God. Nothing will. We're not talking are we there. About the holiness of God. We're not talking there about God's distance from us. The holiness of his matchless purity.

[11 : 08] But here we're talking about his holiness in drawing near to us. The holiness of love and forgiveness. We're not talking about trembling because of his superior majesty and power.

But because in his majesty and power. God has come to embrace us with his mercy. We're not talking about the fear of God's judgment. But the fear of God's grace.

In case you are tempted to think this just doesn't make any sense. Let me ask you this. Is it not possible for a person to fall down trembling. When they realise that the God of all the universe.

The God who holds the oceans in the hollow of his hand. Has seen them in all their utter wretchedness. But has loved them. And has come for them in his son.

And that his son bled and died for them. And rose again to offer forgiveness and cleansing and adoption and eternal life. And is it not perfectly understandable for a person to be overwhelmed.

[12 : 10] By that as much as any other encounter with God. Is it not God's grace in the person of Jesus. As much of a vision of his greatness.

As any blinding light could ever be of course. It's exactly what we see in many parts of the Bible. It's what we see in Revelation as well. The saints don't just bow down in humble worship.

Because God is powerful. They also bow down in humble worship. Because he is gracious. And I hope you've had that experience yourself. At least at some point in your life.

It seems to me to be the response that makes a lot of sense. If you really grasp what God has done for you. These are the redeemed. And because these are the redeemed.

They fear God's wrath no more. And yet they still fear him. And they fear him for the staggering kindness. That he has showed them in his redemption.

[13 : 08] I think that's a good word. Staggering. His kindness makes redeemed people stag. And then by contrast in verses 14 to 20.

We have harvested. The last part of the chapter. Once again we're told John looks in his vision. And what he sees must have left him wishing. That he closed his eyes. There's a white cloud.

With the son of man seated on it. He's wearing a gold crown. Signifies kingship. He's also holding a sharp sickle. Which is an ominous sign of what he's about to do. Verse 15.

And another angel came out of the temple. Calling with a loud voice. To him who sat on the cloud. Put in your sickle and reap. For the hour to reap has come.

For the harvest of the earth is fully ripe. And then from verse 17. John sees another angel. Who also has a sickle. And this time the worshippers of the beast.

[14:08] They are depicted as grapes on a vine. And he swings his sickle. And the grapes are thrown into the wine press of God's wrath. It's actually the third time in the chapter.

That the wine metaphor is used. And there's something about it. Which captures very eloquently. But eerily. The justice that this image depicts.

Those that have drunk the wine of spiritual adultery. Those who have spent their lives in carefree revelry. Are themselves turned into wine. But the wine here is their blood.

Look at verse 19. So the angel swung his sickle across the earth. And gathered the great harvest of the earth. And threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. The wine press was trodden outside the city.

And blood flowed from the wine press. As high as a horse's bridle. For 1,600 stadia. It's about 180 odd miles.

[15:09] It's the distance of London to Swansea. And there's something which is profoundly shocking. Isn't there? About verse 20. It is almost too graphic to talk about.

It is deeply, deeply disturbing. Now once again I think we need to appreciate. That this is not a description of something that will literally happen. But if this was a film.

Then this image even in fiction would stay with us. And it would probably haunt us for weeks to come. The image is sickening. But it's also important. It's important because while it is symbolic. It is not fiction.

It's reminding us of something true. Something that we need to see. And this is what God plainly shows us. What happens when we harvest it. They will feel the full fury.

Of the Lord's wrath. And they most certainly should fear it. Which leads me back to the middle section. Where we fear the Lord's messengers.

[16:13] Before he tells us what will happen to those who don't belong to Christ. He tells us what it is that God is saying to the world. Because the world's people are not left helplessly. To face some irresistible fate.

God doesn't just arbitrarily save some and leave others. He speaks to us. He speaks to every single one of us. He speaks to the earth. And in fact God has been speaking. Since the beginning of history.

Until now. And he calls people to find refuge from the wrath that is to come. So let me remind you of verse 6 and 7. And I saw another angel.

Flying directly overhead. With an eternal gospel. To proclaim to those who dwell on earth. To every nation. And every tribe. And every language.

And every people. And he said with a loud voice. Fear God. And give him glory. Because the hour of his judgment has come.

[17:09] And worship him who made heaven and earth. The sea and the swims and water. So just notice. It's proclaimed to every tribe and language and people. It's not for some people.

It is for all people. It's not just proclaimed for a moment in time. It is the eternal gospel. And it is the one message that is proclaimed throughout all history.

And the way that it's summarized is in terms. That makes sense in any age of human history. It's a message which would have made sense to Abraham and his family. It's a message that summarizes the book of Ecclesiastes.

Fear God and keep his commandments. This is the whole duty of man. It's a message that made sense in Jesus' day. And the Bible tells us that Jesus in fact self-feared the Lord.

It's a message that spread like wildfire through the book of Acts. And as the message was received by people. So the fear of God grew. And it's a message that makes sense today.

[18:05] Whether you live in Afghanistan or Alberta. This is the message. As he summarizes it. It is the eternal gospel. And look what he's saying. He says there is a God who made everything.

And he is your creator tonight. And he will judge the world. So give him glory. Worship him. And you should fear him. It is striking for its simplicity.

And its straightforwardness. But it's also striking for its firmness. Do you see this? It's not really an invitation is it? Fear God and give him glory. It's not an invitation.

It is a command. It is not a gospel of just warm and friendly reassurances. It is a gospel that demands a response from people. And warns them of what they will face if they don't.

It's a gospel to be obeyed. It is a gospel about God. A God who made us. And a God who according to account.

[19 : 05] And God who deserves and requires your worship. And this is what the angel calls the eternal gospel. And in the end. This gospel divides humanity into two groups.

The redeemed and the harvested. And it is this message that calls on the world to fear the Lord. And it says see him for who he really is. And give him glory.

Not just because he demands it. Though he does demand it. But because he deserves it. And that's very very critical. In the first two sermons of this series.

I try to outline why fearing God is good for us. Because fearing God leads to life. And it leads to fearlessness. But I guess this sermon is about how our fear of God is good for God.

It leads to glory. And not primarily ours. But God's. And when we fear the Lord. It brings glory to him. Fearing him is good for us.

[20 : 07] Yes I've argued that. But even more fundamentally. It is right. It is right. Because God deserves to be glorified. Glorified. He deserves to be glorified.

By our fear. It is right. Because he is everything that the Bible tells us that he is. Listen to how the redeemed put it in the very next chapter. Chapter 15 and verse 3. And they sing the song of Moses. The servant of God. And the song of the Lamb. Saying great and amazing are your deeds. O Lord God almighty. Just and true are your ways. O King and the nations.

Who will not fear O Lord. And glorify your name. For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you. If your righteous acts have been revealed. Who will not fear you O Lord.

Let me try and draw a few threads together. If there is so little fear of God in the world. And yet God deserves the glory.

[21 : 06] That comes to him when people fear him. And if there is a day coming. When all those who refuse to fear him. Will be swallowed up by his righteous anger. Because they have kept the glory for themselves.

That rightly belongs to him. And if God has placed in our hands. And in our hearts. A message. A message that can save them. A message that can see them rescued.

A message that can see them transferred. From the harvestage. To being the redeemed. What should we do? What should we do? It's not a terribly hard question to answer is it?

We should share this message. And we should preach the gospel. This is how the apostle Paul puts it. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 11. He says since then we know what it is to fear the Lord. We seek to persuade people. He goes on from there to describe the ministry that was entrusted to him. And therefore is being entrusted to all who fear the Lord. And are compelled by his love. And it's a ministry shaped by that gospel.

[22 : 08] By this gospel. The eternal gospel. So let me say three things about the ministry in the world to which we've been called. Firstly preach fear.

Preach fear. And when I use the word preach. I don't necessarily mean giving sermons. If you've got the opportunity to give a sermon then great. But most of you will not. Most of you should not actually.

I speak to both men and women before you don't know I'm being sexist that much. But we all have opportunities to give an account for the hope that we have. Every single one of us will have opportunities to share with others what it means that we've been redeemed.

There may be opportunities for long conversations. Or long emails. There will certainly be opportunities for letters. I think as Christians we need to rediscover the art of letter writing with people.

There may be opportunities for a carefully chosen sentence. But as we take these opportunities with people. We have to remember this is the gospel that we've been given. And we're not to change it. You're not free to change it.

[23 : 18] And given the fate of those around us. I can't understand why we'd want to change it. The people we love and know and love. Who aren't redeemed. Need the warning that the gospel gives.

They need its command. And so we should be faithful to it. And when we have the opportunity to say so gently of course. And respectfully of course. We should tell people that there is a God who made them.

That he is their creator. And that he will judge all the world. And so they must give him glory as must we. And all should worship as he rightly deserves it.

And all should fear. And all should fear him for who he is. And they should fear the judgment that he will one day unfurl. And we should invite them. We should invite them to come and fear him for his

mercy.

And to tremble. As well. At this grace. And now if we're going to preach fear. Secondly we need to preach it fearfully. We preach fear fearfully.

[24 : 18] A message this serious. Should be handled seriously. And a message this grave. Should be declared with gravitas. And a message about the fear of God.

Should be delivered with trembling. And there is no place for. The glib or trite telling of this gospel. I think I particularly want to say that.

To preachers. I've got to preach at a minister's conference. Which is partly the reason why I've done this. This is the reason. I do think there is a massive danger for preachers. That actually as congregations.

We want them to be witty. We want them to be funny. We want them to be light. There's no need for heaviness. For heaviness is sick. But it is a grave message. There is no place for the word hell.

Being used lightly. It's one of the reasons. Isn't it? We eliminate it. We eliminate phrases like. What the hell. Or how the hell. Or who the hell. From our vocabulary. Because this message from God.

[25 : 22] Is not to be joked about. Nor is it to be communicated. Arrogantly. Or triumphantly. Or carelessly. And if we have occasions. To speak of the judgment. Tears should never be far from our eyes.

Somebody. I know. Is in Washington DC. Recently. And on the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. Is the following quote. From Jefferson. Engraved on it. He says this. I tremble for my country.

When I reflect. That God is just. That his justice. Cannot sleep forever. Do you tremble for yours? If Revelation 14.

Is true. How can we not tremble? How can we fail to quake. For the men and women. And boys and girls. Of Ealing. Paraville. Hanwell. Brentford. Greenford.

Who live their lives. Living thankless lives. Delighting in the things. That God has made. But ignoring the one. Who made them. Destined in the end. To discover in the end. All too late.

[26 : 22] They should have feared him. Do you tremble for your country? The eternal gospel. As we call on people. To fear God. And give him glory. We should be very conscious.

Of the horrific train wreck. We are seeking to prevent. By speaking these words of life. To fear God. And give him glory. For the hour of his judgment has come. When we preach fear.

We should preach it fearfully. And finally. We should also preach it fearlessly. That's not a contradiction. Of both are true.

We should preach it fearfully. Because of the dangers. Those are in whom we speak. But we should preach it fearlessly. Because we've got no reason. To be embarrassed of the message. That can bring the rescue. So time and time again.

We see this in the New Testament. We saw it. In Matthew 10. When Jesus urged his disciples. To face the inevitable persecution.

[27 : 20] Bravely. Don't be afraid of them. He said. And this was a command. That many of them chose to follow. Even the apostle Paul. Who was himself a great opponent. Of the gospel. Originally he came.

Well he came to be a fearless preacher. Of the gospel. Didn't he? And when he wrote his New Testament letters. He urged prayer. And fearless preaching. So Ephesians 6.19.

He says. And also for me. That words may be given to me. In opening my mouth. Boldly to proclaim. The mystery of the gospel. For which I am an ambassador in chains. That I may declare it. Fearlessly. As I ought to speak.

He delighted to hear. About this thing. I say. Philippians 1.14. And because of my chains. Most of the brothers and sisters. Have become confident in the Lord. And dare all the more. To proclaim the gospel. Without fear.

And the Bible urges us. To remember. That we have nothing. Nothing to fear. Islam. Secularism. Nothing to fear. We have nothing to fear.

[28 : 21] From those who oppose us. And we have nothing to be embarrassed about. In our gospel. The likes of Richard Dawkins. Might jump up and down there. And they rubbish our God. And they dismiss his word.

But we should not step back. People may accuse us. They do accuse us. Of gross intolerance. And bigotry. And arrogance. When we speak of these sorts of things. That Revelation 14 talks about.

But we must not be afraid. Because in our hands. And in our hearts. Is the message of God. God's message. Entrusted to us. And it is the only hope for the world. God. And one day.

Even Richard Dawkins. Will appear before his creator. Someone actually told me. That they had seen an interview. With Dawkins. And he was asked. And what would you say. If it turned out.

That God was real after all. And he had to meet him. And apparently. Dawkins response was. He'd have quite a few questions. He'd like to ask him. As the person who mentioned it to me.

[29 : 19] So cleverly put it. That suggests. A profound lack of imagination. On Dawkins part. Because of course. That day will come. And on that day.

Dawkins will not be asking questions. God won't tolerate. His arrogant questions. Any longer. And when that day comes. He will have tolerated. His questions. With extreme patience.

For long enough. No. When that day comes. It will be God. Who is asking questions. And Dawkins may well find. That he's got no good answers. And so for that reason.

Richard Dawkins. Should be terrified of God. Which I would suggest he is. And he should fear him. And when we preach fear.

We should preach it. Like we really believe it. And we should preach it. With courage. And conviction. And urgency. Why? Because those who are not yet redeemed.

[30 : 13] Both here. And in the farthest corners. Of the globe. They can have no hope. Unless they learn to fear him. And they have no hope. Unless they learn to fear him. And that in itself.

Is a great reason. To preach fear. Fearlessly. But I can give you. A better reason than that. We should preach fear. Fearlessly. Because God deserves.

His glory. Whether or not. Those who we speak. Ever repent. Whether or not. They thank us for the gospel. Or insult us for doing so. Whether we live. Or die.

We will call on people. To fear God. And give him his glory. Because his glory. Is utterly. Utterly deserved. In a world. Where there is so little fear of God.

The God of all glory. Is honoured. Honoured. When his redeemed people. Fearfully. And fearlessly. Preach the gospel. Fear God. And give him glory.

[31 : 09] Because the hour of his judgment. Has come. Fear God. And give him glory. Let's pray.