**The Harvest**

Revelation 14:1-20

Jesus concluded his Olivet discourse in Matthew 24-25 with this challenging contrast:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

Matthew 25:31-32

***What distinguishes the sheep from the goats?*** The ones Jesus welcomes into His eternal home and the ones Jesus casts out into eternal judgment?

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’” Matthew 25:34-36

These blessed ones, Jesus’ true sheep, **the RIGHTEOUS ones** will protest, “When, Lord, did we do any of these things for you?” And He will reply:

“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” Matthew 25:40

***So the way we treat the poor***, the hungry, foreigners and prisoners – especially those among our fellow believers – is the sign that we really follow Jesus. **In other words: LOVE**. “They will know you are my disciples by how you LOVE one another.” “It is by their FRUIT that you will know them.” And the first fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life is LOVE.

True followers of Jesus are marked by LOVE: ***love for God above all*** and love for each other that spills over in love for our fellow man. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Or as James puts it in his letter, “Don’t kid yourself that you love God if you don’t love your brother or sister who is made in God’s image.” The proof of real love for God is tangible love for people.

Are we marked by love? ***Is love your defining characteristic?*** Are you growing in love? Are you more generous, kind and sacrificial this year than you were last year?

Just as Jesus separates the sheep from the goats in Matthew 25, so in Revelation 14 we see **two final harvests of the earth**. First is the wheat harvest of all believers. Then comes the grape harvest of everyone else. You definitely want to be in that wheat harvest – that ingathering that precedes the wedding feast of the Lamb. You don’t want to be in the grape harvest because those grapes get trampled under the righteous, everlasting fury of God.

So let’s walk through Revelation 14 and look for **the four marks of genuine Christ-followers**.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Centered **Identity**

“Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.” Revelation 14:1

Again we see **144,000 marked with the seal of God** on their foreheads. We first saw this group in chapter 7 when God paused the opening of the seals to identify the people on earth who belong to Him, to protect them from the coming wrath when the last seal would be opened and the trumpets would begin to sound. In chapter 7 there were 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. And right after those 144,000 were named from Israel, we saw:

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Centered **Identity**

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.” Revelation 7:9

John asked who this multicultural multitude was and the angel told him:

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Centered **Identity**

“And he said to me, ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’” Revelation 7:14

In other words, **these are the martyrs** who have been killed for their faith in the Lord Jesus and their allegiance to Him. Those still remaining on earth, the 144,000, are marked with the seal of God and the wrath of His judgments do not fall on them. We saw this in chapter 9 when the ***demon-locust-scorpions*** were released from the pit of hell.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Centered **Identity**

“They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” Revelation 9:4

Now, some scholars believe the 144,000 are Jewish converts in the tribulation who become Christian missionaries. There is a case to be made for that since 12 Jewish tribes are named in chapter 7. But on the balance, I think 12 times 12 x 1,000 is **a number of total completion** for all of God’s people, or for all of those who belong to the Lord during the great tribulation. Come back to chapter 14.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Centered **Identity**

“Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.” Revelation 14:1

If this were a precise number of converts, wouldn’t you expect it to have grown by now? Maybe doubled or tripled? But notice **WHERE the 144,000 are**. In chapter 7 they were clearly on earth. In chapter 9 they were still on earth because they had to be protected from the demon-locusts. Now they are on Mount Zion with the Lamb. In other words, they are now in heaven, before the throne of God, which is explicit in verse 3.

How do you know that you really belong to Jesus and will join Him on Mount Zion and before His throne forever? The first mark of a true follower of Jesus is that ***His name is written on your forehead.*** Not literally. The mark of the beast seems that it will be a literal mark during the actual tribulation. And the seal of God during the tribulation may well be visible. But this is a reference to Deuteronomy 6 and the “great shema” of Israel that called all of God’s people to love Him with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength and to write this law on their hearts and carry it with them as frontlets before their eyes and on the doorposts of their houses.

Orthodox Jews still take this command literally and carry little boxes of Scripture that they wear around all the time. ***The intent wasn’t literal so much as INTERNAL.*** God’s Word is in your heart, on your mind and therefore on your lips so you talk about it with your children when you get up in the morning and when you lie down at night and when you walk along the way.

In other words, your identity is centered on the Lord. He is in your heart, on your mind and on your lips.

**What is the center of your identity**? It’s not hard to figure out the answer:

* ***What do you think about*** most of the time? When you have a second without duties or obligations, where does your mind come back to rest?
* ***What do you worry about?*** That is what you most treasure.
* ***What do you talk about most?*** Whatever you love and think about you will correspondingly talk about. One more.
* ***What do you spend your money on?*** As with solving any crime: follow the money.

***Are all of these, for you, centered on Jesus?*** Is he frequently on your mind? Are you such a student of God’s Word that Scripture frequently pops into your head? Do you worry, in a good way, about people coming to know Jesus or drawing closer to Jesus? Do you talk about Jesus and His Word? Is that natural for you or does it feel forced? Do you spend money on kingdom ministries so that your heart follows your giving?

Imagine if the **ONE THING** you loved most and thought about most and talked about most ***suddenly appeared VISIBLY on your forehead***. Would you be embarrassed? Would you race out of the room? Or would we all see the name of Jesus?

That’s the first mark of a genuine Christ follower in Revelation 14. The 144,000 on Mount Zion have God’s name and the name of the Lamb on their foreheads. Second:

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Exalting **Worship**

“And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder.” Revelation 14:2

Since the voice here is singular and it thunders, we expect this to be the voice of God or of Jesus or some mighty angel right? But no! Not this time!

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Exalting **Worship**

“The voice I heard was like the sound of many harpists playing on their harps.” Revelation 14:2

We had **a friend who played the harp**, which is like a $5,000 instrument. If we told her that when she played it was like the roar of Niagra falls or like the sound of loud thunder I think she would be pretty offended. Harp is like the gentlest of instruments with sweet, mild notes.

But if you get thousands upon thousands and millions upon millions of believers all playing the harp at the same time, I suppose it would add up to thunder and roaring waters. But then the noise and clamor gives way to a song.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Exalting **Worship**

“And they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures.” Revelation 14:3

We don’t get to hear this song, though I expect it is along the lines of the ones we heard in chapters 4-5: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come… Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive glory and honor and power and dominion forever and ever amen.”

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Exalting **Worship**

“No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.” Revelation 14:3

Every follower of Jesus ***will be given a new name***, known only to that person and King Jesus who gives it to them; a new name written on a white stone, according to the letter to Thaytira in chapter 2. And now we see that in heaven we will be taught a new song. Or maybe this is a special blessing for those who are killed in the great tribulation – they get a special tribulation soundtrack from the Lamb.

Of course it will be ***a song to King Jesus***, celebrating His glory. A song for the Lamb who was slain, yet lives; for the Lion of Judah who reigns; for the Son of God and Son of Man who gave His life as a ransom for many. The Great Redeemer.

Does your heart sing the praises of the Lamb? This is the second mark of a true Christian. Your identity is centered on Jesus. And the soundtrack of your life is the worship of Jesus. ***Maybe with hymns, maybe with a new chorus*** from this year. Maybe you write your own songs; maybe you borrow from others. Maybe you sing like crazy in your car with the Joy FM. Maybe you belt out hymns in the shower. Maybe you sing quietly as you walk around your neighborhood. Or maybe you’re tone deaf and you spare everyone the pain of your voice, keeping your song quiet in your own mind.

The point is that your heart and life worship and honor Jesus, not the things of this world. Remember, this chapter is a series of contrasts. The 144,000 are marked with the name of God. The other earth dwellers wear the mark of the beast. Listen to the warning in v. 11.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Exalting **Worship**

“And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever… those worshipers of the beast… whoever receives the mark of its name.” Revelation 14:11

The mark of the beast will one day be a literal mark or device that lets you buy and sell things. But anyone who lives for this world and worships the ruler of this world is already marked by the beast internally. Instead of worshiping King Jesus, **they worship this world** and most often worship themselves as their own king.

***What do you truly worship?*** The tests are similar to determining your true identity.

* What do you most fear to lose?
* What, if it gets threatened, makes you worry the most?
* What, if you have it, makes you feel the most safe and happy?
* What gets your best time, your best energy, and the lion’s share of your money?

That is your functional god. Whatever you love the most, serve the most, trust the most. That is your idol.

One of the most common idols today is **CHILDREN**. We protect them like precious china dolls and worry obsessively over their safety. Parents escort them to every sporting event and activity like the secret service. Why do kids these days grow up to feel like they’re the center of the world? Because we have MADE THEM the center of our world!

Another common idol is **MONEY**. Anyone ever guilty of worrying about money? Oh, it’s fine IF YOU HAVE IT. It’s just those worrisome times that you don’t have enough.

So we worship **WORK and SUCCESS** and advancement. And often what that success is in service of is romantic love.

Because really, we worship **OURSELVES**. So our culture defines love as how someone makes you FEEL. Which isn’t really loving the other person, but is just loving yourself!

Listen to the eternal gospel the angel proclaims in verse 7.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Exalting **Worship**

“Fear God and give him glory because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth…” Revelation 14:7

This is the call that goes out to everyone on earth all the time **through creation**: fear God and honor Him. Worship the One who made all things. Romans one tells us that all people are without excuse before God since “His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being evident from what has been made.” People suppress this truth by their wickedness, but it is an indisputable and universal truth.

Does your heart sing with worship for the Creator and Lord of the universe? Do you sing and make music in your heart to the Lord Jesus? The first mark of a true Christian is that your identity is centered on Jesus. Second, your heart delights to worship Jesus. Third:

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Like **Purity**

“It is these who have not defiled themselves with women… who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” Revelation 14:4

This verse, to me, shows that the 144,000 is ***a figurative number*** for all believers. If we take this section literally we would be forced to conclude that only MEN get saved; only men are part of the 144,000 redeemed of the Lord. I think we can all agree that if God were going to choose one or the other… it would certainly be women.

When ***the adulterous woman*** was brought before Jesus to be stoned, who do you think were holding the stones? Any women in that group? But Jesus looked right through the proud, religious men and said, “If any of you is without sin, go ahead and throw the first stone.”

But the point here is not the gender of these people but their **PURITY**. They have not been corrupted by the immorality of Babylon. That was the message of the second angel.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Like **Purity**

“Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.” Revelation 14:8

There are **two kinds of wine** in this chapter, just as there are two kinds of people. There is the wine of Babylon’s immorality. And don’t miss the fact that Babylon is presented as a promiscuous woman in Revelation, which is why the faithful men of the 144,000 are shown having resisted her enticements.

There is the wine of this world that will provoke the wine of God’s righteous fury. Verse 10. Whoever worships the beast and receives his mark:

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Like **Purity**

“He also will drink the wine of God’s wrath poured full strength into the cup of his anger.” Revelation 14:10

***Drinking the wine of Babylon will cause you to drink the wine of God’s judgment.*** That imagery comes to fruition in the grape harvest, which is the contrast to the wheat harvest for the righteous. The wicked will be harvested from the earth like grapes:

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Like **Purity**

“And gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.” Revelation 14:19

This imagery of trampling and crushing grapes refers back to **Isaiah 63**. “I have trodden the winepress alone.” It’s a picture of the Servant of the Lord – King Jesus – seeing that no one else was bringing peace and justice to the world so He says, “I’ll do it myself.”

***God’s judgment fell first on Israel with the exile***, and with the hardening of their hearts in the time of Jesus so the gospel could go to gentiles like us. Righteousness and praise were supposed to grow up from Israel as a fruitful vineyard, as Oaks of righteousness in Isaiah 61. God did not find in Israel the holiness and purity of a bride well prepared. But still in Isaiah God promises that one day His people WILL have that kind of untarnished righteousness.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Like **Purity**

“And they shall be called the Holy people, The Redeemed of the Lord.” Isaiah 62:12

That’s the verse that immediately precedes Isaiah 63 and the trampling of the grapes: the hope of Israel’s spiritual transformation one day. We are the initial fulfillment of that promise, that Revelation shows coming to its final culmination. The redeemed - the ransomed ones purchased out of the corruption and immorality of this world.

What about us? ***Are we marked by Christ-like holiness and purity?*** Are we untarnished by the wine of Babylon’s immorality? Do we stand firm against temptation and idolatry? Do we follow the Lamb wherever He goes? Do we keep in step with the Lord Jesus?

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Like **Purity**

“And in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.” Revelation 14:5

Do we lie and cheat and covet and steal to get more from others in the world? Do we take advantage of people? Do we love things and use people or the other way around? Are we truly BLAMELESS? That’s the third mark of a true follower of Jesus. One more.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Empowered **Freedom**

“These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb.” Revelation 14:4

***Why did God create the world?*** Why did He plant people in it? For the harvest He would one day reap. Believers who die in the Lord are the firstfruits of that harvest, previewing the final harvest of the righteous and the wicked when Jesus comes back.

***Redemption is the language of the market and specifically of slaves.*** If you got into financial distress there was no bankruptcy proceeding, there were no government programs to help you. Your options were to sell yourself as a slave, or (if you were lucky) sell some of your children as slaves first. And your hope was to save up money so you could REDEEM THEM – buy them back out of slavery.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Empowered **Freedom**

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord… that they may rest from their labors.” Revelation 14:13

To be redeemed is to be ***set free from slavery to sin and this world***. And ultimately it is to be set free from the burdensome labors of this life: coming into the eternal rest God has promised those who love Him.

**God created in a seven-day week**, culminating in the first Sabbath day, the 7th day. Israel’s calendar was built around the Sabbath, every seventh day. And their calendar year celebrated seven feasts or festivals, some that would last for a full week. Every seventh year was supposed to be a year of release from slavery and debts; and a year to let the fields rest and rejuvenate. Every 50th year; 7 x 7; was a JUBILEE, a full release of all land back to its original owners.

Of course, ***Israel never actually celebrated a Jubilee*** and it seems likely that they didn’t really practice the seventh-year release of slaves either. But you can’t miss these principles in the Law of Moses, it’s all written in there in flashing lights.

Sabbath rest. **We are in a season of LABOR**. But our sabbath rest is coming. The book of Hebrews celebrates this: There yet remains a sabbath rest for the people of God!

Do you feel the weariness of this world and your labors in it? Be encouraged. ***Your true rest is coming.***

This is our summary for today.

**The Marks of Genuine Christ-Followers:**

1. Christ-Centered **Identity**
2. Christ-Exalting **Worship**
3. Christ-Like **Purity**
4. Christ-Empowered **Freedom**

This chapter is a **contrast between the righteous and the wicked**, the sheep and the goats. How can you be sure you belong to Jesus and that He will welcome you into His eternal kingdom? These are the signs.

First, ***your identity is centered on Jesus***. His name is on your forehead. Thoughts of Him fill your mind. You refuse to let anything in this world seduce you away from the Lord.

Second, ***your heart sings the praises of King Jesus***. He is your joy and your treasure. You refuse to bow down to any other idol; you will not let your heart allegiance shift to money or work or people or success or yourself.

Third, ***you protect your purity*** in the Lord. You maintain intentional defenses against temptation and sin. As Luther said, “You can’t keep the birds from flying overhead, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair.” It’s not about being perfect but about making PROGRESS: becoming more like Jesus every day, every month, every year.

Fourth, ***you live in freedom*** as one of the redeemed of the Lord. You are not bound to the things of this world or the ways of this world. You have embraced the yoke of King Jesus and found that it is easy, and His burden is light. You feel the labors of this dark and broken world, and your heart longs for the full and final rest that will come when Jesus returns.

That’s how this remarkable chapter ends: with **the final harvest**.

“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.” Revelation 14:14

Who will accomplish the final harvest of souls? Who will call home the righteous and pronounce judgment on the wicked? Jesus. The glorious Son of Man. The one seated on the cloud. He is the One who holds the sharp sickle. He is the One who will tread the winepress of the fury of God.

But don’t miss the gospel in this wine-trampling imagery.

“Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?” Isaiah 63:2

On that last day Jesus will trample the wicked under his feet. But when we see Jesus returning victorious, he is covered with blood BEFORE the final battle with His enemies.

“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war… He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.”

Revelation 19:11,13

Throughout Revelation Jesus is called THE LAMB. He looks as if He has been slain, yet He is standing, very much alive. Then in His glorious return He is riding a white horse, leading the hosts of heaven to full and final victory. But his robe is dipped or sprinkled in blood. In other words, the blood is HIS OWN.

***Jesus allowed HIMSELF to be trampled in the winepress*** of the fury of God’s righteous judgment. He drank the full cup of God’s just wrath against your sin and mine. That’s what happened as Jesus hung on the cross and the whole universe groaned, and the earth shook, and darkness fell, and the rocks split.

You can either be marked by His blood or you will be trampled under His feet.

Do you belong to King Jesus? If you aren’t sure that you do, please talk with a Christian friend today!

Let’s pray.