

Sermon 45: Revelation 14:6-13: Messages from heaven

OUTLINE

The first angel

The second angel

The third angel

INTRODUCTION

If God spoke three messages from heaven, what would they be? I believe that the portion we have before us gives us a possible answer to that question. This section deals with God sending three messenger angels to deliver three particular messages during the period where the dragon and his beasts are at war with the church. In other words, these three words from heaven are what God is saying to the earth during this age before Christ comes again. This section consists of three messages for the world, but also a call and benediction for the church, v12-13. Revelation has portrayed the nature of the battle we are in, with the devil and his cohorts waging war against us. We have been encouraged with the safety and victory of the saints who have been killed v1-5, now the vision returns to those on the earth with three messages of judgement and warning. God does not look lightly upon those who follow the devil in whatever lie he has enthralled them with, and He will punish and judge those who participate in His lie against God's people. Before that judgement comes God gives three messages.

The first angel

V6-7, 'Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. 7 And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.'" We can see that the first message is the gospel. It is described as the eternal gospel, this could be because of the certainty of judgement or life it promises, but in the first century context it could hold a more polemical note. Augustus Caesar's birthday was often celebrated because it 'signalled the beginning of good news for the world.' In other words, this angel is bringing the true good news for the world and not the pseudo-gospel of the Roman empire with its promise of worldly peace and prosperity.

Now some might want to read into the fact that an angel is preaching the gospel and see this as a precedent for angels preaching to the Muslims. This would certainly be to read too much into the text and put an unfair question to the text which would force a wrong answer. This verse should not be viewed as a way of alleviating the church of its responsibility to be the witness for the world as appointed by Christ in the Great Commission.

As we scan this verse we see that it is primarily a call to repent because of impending judgement. It threatens that the hour of judgement has come. How then can this be the

gospel, the good news? The fact that judgement is coming is certainly part of the gospel. If we do not receive Christ, then we ourselves must be judged. The gospel consists of the message that because of your sins death is the penalty, but God in His love sent Jesus to die on your behalf. If you reject this offer of mercy, if you do not believe it, or if you scorn at it, or if you choose an alternative means of trying to get forgiveness, then you do not a saviour who has already taken your judgement for you. This means that you will be left to take that judgement yourself. The second reason why it is good news that there is a judgement coming is because when God finally judges His enemies all sin, and all enemies will be finally put away, and a New Creation free from the effects of sin will be brought in. the judgement also indicates the final freedom of the church where we receive our inheritance. It will be a day of rejoicing for the church. Their suffering will be over and God's eternal pleasures at His right hand will be their eternal prospect.

This gospel is framed in the language of fearing God. In the context of idolatry where idolaters have been fearing false gods this is a call to give to the true God His due reverence. Fear is not a way we like to talk about our service to God but it is most appropriate as we remember that God is indeed a holy judge and cannot be trifled with. The call is also to give Him glory, this is probably because idolaters give glory to another god. They attribute other gods with their existence and blessings, they deny the true Creator for their own vain imaginations.

The nations are called to repent and return to God because the hour of His judgement has come. It is pending and certain. The second motivation is the fact that God is the Creator and after the logic of Romans 1, it is only right that we acknowledge and give thanks to Him.

This is the first message from. Judgement is certain, repent and return to God!

The second angel

V8, 'Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.'" The second message has to do with the great system of Rome, as Babylon and that this world's greatest power, this world's greatest economic provider, this world's strongest armies with all of her pomp, luxury, and apparent eternal sovereignty is judged and exposed for what she really is. Applying it to our world today, this message is that any earthly system with its wealth, prosperity, promises of technology of living on another planet and keeping you alive eternally by growing body parts for spares, this so called saviour is judged and is nothing more than a cheap counterfeit and prostitute.

Babylon has not yet been revealed as the first and second beasts have, however this is a typical thing in the book of Revelation. It is often the case that some thing that is only developed later in the book is anticipated and hinted at earlier in the book. For example, even though the beast had not been revealed he was already being shown to be waging war against the church in 11:7. Likewise although Babylon has not yet been revealed, this

mentioned helps us to see the structure of the book of Revelation and to know that these visions run parallel to each other not chronologically one after the other.

This is not the literal Babylon of the OT. The Babylon of the OT was permanently destroyed, Babylon was prophesied to fall and never recover, Jer. 50:39, "Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her. She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations. 40 As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbouring cities, declares the LORD, so no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her.' Those who believed that Saddam Hussein who was attempting to rebuild Babylon was a fulfilment of some futurist version of the book of Revelation failed to appreciate this fact. Babylon is being used as a symbol, not literally. As a symbol it represents a world power who destroys the temple of Israel, oppresses God's people, and forces the nations to bow to its image (Nebuchadnezzar's image). In the first century the early Christians referred to Rome by this name, 1 pet. 5:13.

We see that she made the nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality. There is a possible translation of her wrath and her sexual immorality. Sexual immorality is likely a spiritual picture of idolatry and adultery, but could also encompass the decadent living of Rome. And if passion is to be translated as anger, the reference would be to her war and idolatry as being inflicted upon the nations.

The reference to fallen is almost an exact quote from Jer. 51:7-8, 'Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad. Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken; wail for her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed.' Jeremiah prophesies in the past tense of the fall of Babylon although it had not yet happened. Revelation's repeating of this OT prophesy which has already been fulfilled speaks with a note of certainty about Rome falling as well. We would not limit Babylon to Rome but recognise Babylon to be any satanically inspired world order that imitates her, and when Jesus comes again, there will be another world system in opposition to God and His people who will bear the final brunt of His wrath.

The message of the second angel is this: any so called saviour you are relying in, will be judged and is leading you into sin.

The third angel

The third angel gets more explicit about the judgement that awaits those who do not repent and who continue to follow the world's system, v9-11, 'And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.'"

This last message is very clear, if you are an idolater who aligns yourself with Rome you will go to hell. We have shown that worshipping the beast is probably the Imperial Religion of Rome, and the mark is a symbol of allegiance in mind and deed. The point is this. If you have drunk from Babylon's cup of lies, seduction, idolatry and sin, then you will also have to drink from God's cup of undiluted wrath.

Wine is a fitting picture for wrath because grapes are crushed to obtain the juice, for this reason drinking wine in communion as a memorial to Christ who was crushed like a grape and poured out His life blood for us is fitting. But notice that there is a reference to the full strength of God's wrath, the wrath that unbelievers will have to face on judgement day will be the full and unrestrained activity of God's holiness giving sin all that it deserves. There will be no mercy mixed into it in that it is a partial judgement, the day of mercy will have passed. This full frontal experiencing of God's wrath we are told includes being tormented with fire and sulphur, sounds like being dropped into a live volcano. And added to this will be the shame of the judgement in the presence of the Lamb and His angels. Verse 11 is explicit on the nature of the final judgement as eternal torment, the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. Now some have tried to say that the smoke is an eternal memorial but not an indication of eternal torment, but the next part of the verse leaves us without any doubt, 'they have no rest, day or night.' In contrast to the saints who have entered into their rest and enjoy a conscious enjoyment of God's presence, 6:11, these unbelievers experience the opposite, a conscious constant torment and lack of rest. We see the text again repeats that those who follow the world's system as opposed to Christ will be the ones who will be punished like this. And we see in Rev. 20:10 that this is the same judgement the devil will receive.

The facts are inescapable, eternal judgement awaits those who do not turn to Christ. This is a difficult pill to swallow, but we understand that the violation of a person of infinite majesty demands an infinite punishment. And we are to process this truth believingly not with doubt and like Paul let it urge us on in earnest to preach more deliberately, 2 Cor. 5:10-11.

The message of the third angel for the world is plain, if you do not repent and follow Christ instead of this world's pseudo-saviours you will be punished with infinite punishment.

But if someone refused to follow the emperor and offer incense to his statue he would be killed, read verse 12, 'Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.' The stakes are high, the choice is between heaven or hell, and if it means sinning or death, the Christian must choose to die. To keep God's commands and be true to the faith even if it means death. For it is those who endures to the end who will be saved. We must not be like those seeds that fell on the stony ground that when the persecution came they drew back. Luke 9:62, 'Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."'

Verse 13 reminds us that martyrdom is better than compromise not merely because God is worth our lives but because we enjoy eternal rest and reward, 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed

indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"
This is the 2nd of 7 benedictions given in Revelation.

1:3, 'Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.'

14:13

16:15, '("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")

19:9, 'And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."'

20:6, 'Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.'

22:7, "'And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.'"

22:14, 'Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.'

They all seem to indicate the same responsibility and eschatological blessings.

The martyrs will rest while they wait their vindication, and their works will follow them and be noted by God for reward. 1 Cor. 15:58, 'Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.'

The promise however also applies to those who are not martyrs but merely in the Lord, they too also inherit the same blessings.

The message from heaven for our day is plain, repent, worship God alone, do not follow the lies of this age or you will be judged and if you are faithful you will enter glory and be rewarded.