

Heaven Celebrates What the Hell-Bound Mock

We sometimes justify the sins of our generation by thinking that we face pressures and circumstances other generations never had. Whenever you seriously read history, though, you know that argument is hogwash.

Every generation faces the call to repent of their sins, trust Jesus, and follow him. And that has always led to emotionally difficult moments for believers as they daily make choices based on the ONE BIG CHOICE they have already made to follow Jesus no matter the cost!

A case in point comes to us from over 1600 years ago. There was a man who had a Christian mom and a pagan dad. She taught him the way and prayed for him, but as a young man he decided to follow the ways of his dad.

The next 20 years saw him searching for meaning in all the wrong places. He dabbled with things like astrology and various religious movements. He looked for truth everywhere but the church. He was convinced of one thing- pursuing pleasure apart from taking responsibility was a good thing. He had several lovers over the years, and then lived with a woman outside of marriage for 14 years.

Eventually he was just miserable in his life. He realized he didn't control the pleasures of the flesh, they controlled him. He felt himself drawn to church, and then convicted when he would hear the Bible preached. Then one day he was sitting in a garden, and heard a voice over the garden wall quote Romans 13:14, which says, "Put on the Lord Jesus, and make no provision for the works of the flesh."

Right then at the age of 36 he cried out to Jesus and was born again! He immediately began taking steps to line up his life with his faith, including breaking up with his live in girlfriend. We call him Saint Augustine, who went on to become a key figure in church history, writing several Christian classics like the *Confessions* and *The City of God*. You can run, but you can't out-run a mother's prayers!

As Christians we are called to make daily choices based on the ONE BIG CHOICE we made when we trusted Jesus and committed to follow Him no matter the cost!

And when we do that, we can expect the world to mock us, but today we'll see that Heaven celebrates what the Hell-Bound mock!

Read Revelation 14 PRAY!

V. 1 The 144,000 - Mission Accomplished!

This is undoubtedly the same people we saw in chapter seven: 144,000 Jewish men who come to Christ early in the Tribulation and are sovereignly sealed and equipped to be a witness to every people group on earth.

Today's passage is letting us know they had accomplished their mission!
This seems to look forward to the end of the tribulation, and these 144,000 Billy Graham's are standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, exchanging high 5's!

Mt. Zion usually means the Temple area of Jerusalem on earth. But in Hebrews 12:22 it refers to the Heavenly Jerusalem. That certainly is where the next set of voices is going to come from. But scholars are divided about whether the 144,000 are with Christ in Heaven or in Jerusalem. We are not sure!

What is not in doubt is that here they have finished their exceptionally successful time of witnessing, and they are ready to reign with Christ!

What good news this is after seeing the Unholy trio of Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet in action in chapters twelve and thirteen.

V. 2-5 The 144,000 - Maturity Affirmed!

I love how all of Heaven seems to stop so the 144,000 can be celebrated!

Now why does it say they sang a new song?
Because God had done this work in their time!

We love to sing old songs because of the way God worked in the past! But new songs are always welcome because of the work God is doing in our generation!

I believe the voices leading this new song will be the ones converted under the witness of the 144,000. Nothing fires me up more than when I see people I've led to Jesus praising God with their lives and with their mouths!

When it says no one could learn the song but the 144,000, the Greek word there means, "experimentally understand."

Only this group of 144,000 witnesses had been through the unique challenges of the tribulation, and this song will mean so much to them! Mocked by the Hell-Bound on earth, they are celebrated in Heaven!

What traits of the 144,000 are celebrated in Heaven:

1. Their purity! They are virgins!

When they received Jesus, they committed themselves to absolute purity. And just like Paul, these 144,000 committed themselves not to marry at all so they could focus on their seven year mission to reach the world!

Folks, God calls us to purity as well!

It defiles a person when they have sex before marriage.

It defiles a married person to receive sexual stimulation apart from their spouse.

Now don't be foolish and think this is a criticism of the right use of sex in a marriage; this is a celebration of purity!

Mocked on earth, purity is prized in Heaven!

2. Their passion for Jesus

Verse four tells us they follow the Lamb wherever He goes!

These 144,000 were bananas about Jesus! They wanted to be where He was!
They looked to see where He was at work and joined Him!

Oh, that God would raise up a generation of pure youth that follow Jesus wherever He goes! And consciously take Him with them wherever they go!

Mocked on earth, being a Jesus Freak is prized in Heaven!

3. Their lives were lived to make a difference

Verse four says they were the Firstfruits for God? Firstfruits of what?
Of those who came to Christ during the Tribulation!

These 144,000 gave their time and resources to take the gospel to the nations, and chapter seven gives us reason to believe they will win millions to Jesus!

Mocked on earth, leading others to Jesus is prized in Heaven!

We ought to initiate greater commitment to these traits in our own lives now!
We ought to say 'attaboy' to those who model these things now!

Let me give you one homework assignment this week:

Once again in verse 12 we see the choice those who want to go to Heaven must make: faith in Jesus, obedience to His commands, and endurance for Him!

Taken together, this will be the last chance those on earth get to repent during the time of the tribulation: the bowls are about to be poured out.

But it's important that we realize that we are being called now to make our daily choices based on the ONE BIG CHOICE we have made to follow Jesus!

Crawford Loritts relates how one of his friends faced this in parenting...

Andrew, a teenage son of one of my good friends, let his dad know he thought he would be invincible against temptation not long ago. The event was a classic for us parents: Andrew wanted to attend a party that his father felt would take him to the limits of his willpower. His dad remembered what such parties had done for his own spiritual life in high school. As a consequence, he said no to Andrew.

“Dad, you’ve always trusted me!” Andrew was hurt by his father’s refusal to give the permission he sought. “Why won’t you trust me this time?” My friend offered this bit of wisdom. “Because after all you’ve told me,” he said, “I feel uncomfortable with who you said was going to be there. I’m uncomfortable with what you said would go on at that party. Technically, it’s not true that I don’t trust you, Son. But I don’t trust your flesh. Neither do I trust my own!”
-Crawford Loritts, *Make it Home Before Dark*, p 60

The beginning of the fall for us is when we deny or minimize our capacity to sin and play with temptation rather than fleeing from it!

V. 13 Heaven Celebrates the death of God’s people

We can’t help it – we view death as a bad thing! But death is only the end of life as we’ve known it! Our perspective on earth is so limited!

Jim Elliott along with a total of five missionaries were speared to death by the Auca Indians and LIFE Magazine ran pictures of their bodies with the caption, “Why this waste?”

But the story was different in Heaven! They were welcomed to Heaven and perhaps even sung over as they arrived! And God looked down and said, “Because of this sacrifice, I’m going to save the whole tribe!”

Now if you had asked Jim Elliott, “Jim, would you give the rest of your life to reach the Aucas?” I can almost guarantee you he would have said yes!

When Jim and the other missionaries made it to Heaven, they rested, but they have also been able to see their works, in the form of actual Aucas saved, join them in Heaven as the years have passed!

This blessing must have meant so much to John, who had seen his brother James and his fellow apostles killed for the faith! They were resting, and their converts would follow them to glory!

V. 14-20 Three More Angels will Implement Judgment

Now this passage anticipates the Second Coming of Christ and the Battle of Armageddon we will read more about in chapter 16 and chapter 19.

Immediately after this chapter we will get to the most severe judgments yet, the bowl judgments. I think the bowl judgments happen in rapid succession toward the very end of the great tribulation with almost no time between them.

Let's look at these three angels!

First, a “Guardian” Angel Appeals (from the Earth’s Temple?) V. 14-16

This seems to be an angel at the earthly temple, who has been watching the Antichrist desecrate the Temple. In disgust this angel appeals for Jesus to bring down the sickle of judgment, probably referring to the bowl judgments.

That He has a sickle in His hand signifies that the consummation of the age rests in His power.
-Oecumenius (6th century), ACC, p 232

What this angel appeals for from earth is guided by Heaven's perspective!
Oh that more of our prayers were guided by Heaven's perspective!
Thy will be done, O Lord, on earth as it is in Heaven!

Second, a “Judgment” Angel Appears from the Heavenly Temple V. 17

This angel appears to be part of getting Heaven ready for the battle of Armageddon we will see described in chapters 16 and 19.

Third, a “Fire” Angel Appeals (from Earth’s Temple?) V. 18-20

This may be another angel centered at the earthly Temple. It could be he is driven by the prayers he has heard prayed at the altar.

He appeals to the Angel at the Heavenly Temple to act, and verses 19 and 20 describe it happening! Identical language will be used in chapters 16 and 19 to describe Christ's defeat of Antichrist's forces at the battle of Armageddon.

Now let me be fair: another way to take these two different harvests is the Pre-Wrath rapture view. I have already told you I think the rapture happens before the tribulation, the Pretribulational rapture view.

“Because you have kept My command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come over the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” -Revelation 3:10

**“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
-I Thessalonians 5:9**

If we will not experience God's wrath, the key question is when God's wrath begins related to the tribulation. I believe it happens before the opening of the first seal, the first event of the tribulation.

The Pre-Wrath view is that there is a distinction between troubles that come from the hand of man or Satan in the tribulation, and the time God's wrath is poured out.

The Pre-Wrath view says that up until now in Revelation it's been a time of tribulation passively allowed by God, but with the bowls it will be a time of God's wrath being actively poured out.

So in that view the rapture happens when Jesus is harvesting the saints in verse 16, and the other angel is gathering the remaining wicked in verses 19-20 to be put down at the Battle of Armageddon. That fits well with how harvesting actually works, where the wheat is harvested and the chaff is done away with.

To me that is the other most compelling rapture view!
I believe it's held by our former pastor, who is a very good student of God's Word.

Now, on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being firm doctrinal conviction, I am a 10 in being Pre-Millennial, that there will be a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth we call the Millennium.

Almost everybody that interprets the Bible literally believes that!
But great conservative scholars are divided on the timing of the rapture.

On a scale of 1 to 10 I am a 5 or 6 that the rapture will be before the Tribulation. It is an issue we need to be humble about. And if we do wind up going through part or all of the tribulation, we will also be ready!

Now let's get back to the larger point. Look at verses 19-20.

I'll leave it to others to explain how the bloody battle in the Valley of Megiddo could cause blood to drain into the Jordan Valley and all the way to the Dead Sea.

What verses 19-20 tell us is that there will be a reckoning for those who try to destroy God's people, particularly Israel. As we will learn in chapter 16 and 19, a worldwide army led by the Antichrist will descend on the Valley of Megiddo to try and destroy God's beloved people once and for all. Do you see the point?

One day the blood of those who would do Israel harm will flow in the Promised Land.

I hope the President of Iran, who hates Israel, is listening to this.

Haman the Persian (Iran) hung on the gallows he had erected for Mordecai the Jew. The evil plans the President of Iran has for Israel will come back on his head.

On earth God's people are mocked. But Heaven celebrates what the Hell-Bound Mock! I hope you do as well, and make your daily choices based on the ONE BIG CHOICE you have already made to follow Jesus no matter the cost!

Earlier I told you about Saint Augustine. One day Saint Augustine was approached by a woman who had been one of his mistresses before his conversion. When he turned and walked away quickly, she called after him, "Augustine, it's me, it's me!" Quickening his pace, he called over his shoulder, "Yes, I know, but it's no longer me!"
-Clay Sterrett, Kingdom Priorities, p 125

When the Hell-Bound crowd you used to run with tries to get you to sin, or to mock you for following Jesus now, here's what you say...

That's who I was, but it's not who I am!

Let's Pray!