

**“Grapes of Wrath”
Revelation 14
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Are you ever ashamed of God?

Have you ever been reading in the OT and you came across an account of some action of God and you wish God hadn't done that?

You read the account of Joshua and the Israelites invading Canaan and killing every living thing - people and animals - and doing it at God's command and you cringe - thinking "How could God condone or worse yet command that?"

And if someone at school or at work brought the subject up, you'd have a hard time explaining it - you'd find yourself somewhat embarrassed by God.

A God of love and forgiveness we find easy to talk about.

But a God of bloodshed and eternal torment - He's embarrassing.

Is God wrong or have we missed something?

I will next read a passage of Scripture that **could be** embarrassing to a Christian who believes what it says.

I plan to read the last half of chapter 14 of Revelation. Find it please in your Bible.

The Apostle John has a vision, describing in symbolic terms, what will happen when Jesus comes again.

If it was a movie it would have to be rated "R" for violence.

READ Revelation 14:14-20

I'm certain most of you quickly picked up on what John is describing.

But just in case you missed it look at with me a little more closely.

In verse 14 who is John describing?

Jesus, of course. Jesus as he comes the next time.

John introduced this entire book by referring to this event - the second coming of Jesus.

Rev 1:7 "Look he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be. Amen."

Daniel had predicted this event: 7:13-14 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven."

Jesus referred to himself as the "son of man" - clearly a claim to being prophecy's fulfillment. He was the "messiah" foretold by Daniel.

In Mark 14:62 Jesus said, "I am the Christ...And you will see the Son of Man... coming on the clouds of heaven."

Here's the way Jesus described this event in the gospel of Matthew:

24:30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory."

There can be no doubt that what John envisions in chapter 14 is the second coming of Jesus.

But notice what Jesus is carrying in John's vision: a sharp sickle - a scythe.

I'm certain most of you have seen pictures of a scythe.

It is that long wooden handled, curved blade farm implement that a person uses to cut down grain.

Until the time of the mechanical reaper and the grain combines we know today - farmers all over the world for thousands of years used scythes to harvest their grain.

So Jesus is seen as holding a scythe - a sharp sickle .

And an angel comes from the temple - symbolic of the presence of God - and in essence says, "It's time!"

God has waited as long as he is going to wait.

The time to reap has come."

And making clear that he is not talking about grain, the angel says, "The harvest of the EARTH is ripe."

John is talking about the people of the earth - and as we will see in a minute it is the people of the earth who have rejected Him and his rule in their lives - they are ready for harvest.

And then John sees Jesus take the scythe and swing it across the earth and the earth is harvested - the people are cut down.

It's a graphic portrayal of judgment.

Then changing the analogy slightly from harvesting grain to harvesting grapes John's vision becomes even more graphic.

Don't let the reference to it being an angel who now has the scythe, the sharp sickle, confuse you. Angels are often depicted in the Bible as the ones who work on behalf of the Lord - so here it is the action of the Lord administered through an angel.

But what is the vision?

The “scythe-swinging” angel is to cut down the clusters of grapes because they are ripe - ready to be harvested.

So the clusters of grapes are cut from the vine but this time, as I said, the vision is more graphic - the grapes are thrown into a winepress.

Today we have motorized machinery into which grapes are fed which crush them and extract the juice.

Before such machinery, and for thousands of years, it was common to place the grapes into a large rock or concrete basin with small holes in the bottom.

Then a person would literally stand in the hollowed out rock or basin and stomp the grapes, squeezing the juice out of them.

The juice would sink to the bottom and out the small holes collecting in another basin or bowl.

But in John’s vision it is into **God’s** winepress that the grapes are thrown.

And as you notice it is not grape juice or wine that flows from the winepress - it is blood.

John is not depicting a wine-making operation - he is talking about people who are violently and wholly punished by Jesus - they are slaughtered.

And when John says that the blood rose as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1600 stadia or 180 miles, which is the length of Israel, he is saying that the judgment covered the whole earth.

This is a truly gruesome picture.

Does this mean that people will be thrown into some large vat into which God will climb and stomp them to death?

Of course not, but what is the point of John’s vision:

When Jesus comes his judgment on those who do not belong to him will be physical, swift, violent, deadly and complete.

In Revelation 19 John describes it again in these words:

19:11ff “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns...Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations... He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.”

Do you comprehend what that says?

When Jesus comes again He will literally slaughter everyone who has rejected His love and his authority in their lives.

And according to the passage Pastor Dale showed us last week and according to what chapter 19 presents - those who do not belong to Christ will be resurrected with bodies that will last forever and they will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Here's what John saw in his vision which we looked at last week:
14:10b-11 "He will be tormented with burning sulfur...And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever."

The picture is of the Lord Jesus slaughtering those who have resisted him and then casting everyone of them and everyone like them, who has died through the ages, into a gigantic caldron of eternal torment.

Is it literally fire in the lake of fire?

It could be. God could give resurrected unbelievers bodies that could suffer the torment of fire without ever dying - forever and ever.

Or just as likely what the fire symbolizes is a punishment, a misery, far greater than anything our minds can imagine.

And so God has given us this image of burning in a lake of fire as a way for our little minds to capture just something of how terrible hell will be.

Dante in The Divine Comedy, written 650 years ago and one of the world's great epic poems, tried to capture something of the horror of hell.

He wrote that as he entered hell he saw a sign that read, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!"

And as Dante imagined himself visiting hell he wrote:

"Upon the edge of a high precipice
formed by a circle of huge broken rocks,
we came upon a throng in great torment.
And here the nauseating stench that rose
from out the deep abyss, forced us to rest...

"We now must go down slowly, that our senses
may get accustomed to this sickening blast.

"For I saw multitudes of (people)
who all were weeping piteously, and seemed
tormented all in varying degrees.
While some were lying supine on the ground,
others were sitting huddled in a heap,
or running round about incessantly.
More numerous were those who ran about;
the fewer, those who in their torment lay,
although they cried the louder in their pain.

Over that sandy waste fell slowly down
broad flakes of fire, falling measuredly

like snow upon the Alps in quiet air.
 Just so th' eternal heat was falling down,
 from which the sand, like tinder under steel,
 Burst into flame, the torment to redouble.
 Without a moment's rest the slapping hands
 danced frantically on, now here, now there,
 to brush away the torture of the flames." (Canto 14)

This 13th century description is no more vivid, no more horrifying than John's vision of God's grapes of wrath trampled in the winepress of his fury.

Tell me honestly, is this depiction of God judging people with fire, blood and fury just a little embarrassing?

In this day of tolerance, live and let live and non-judgmentalism, isn't the idea of a God who slaughters, judges and casts people into a lake of fire just a bit much?
 And isn't believing such things more than a little embarrassing?

It's only embarrassing if we don't know God.
 It's only embarrassing if we've never suffered real injustice.
 It's only embarrassing if we lived in a world with no evil.

The Jesus of judgment pictured in these verses is not embarrassing instead he is absolutely imperative.

All of life and all of humanity would be set adrift on a sea of chaos if we didn't know a God of justice.

Imagine an eternity with wrong stronger than right.
 Imagine life forever with evil greater than good.

NO! The life that God created demands justice.

Sin and sinners must be destroyed or there is no point to life.

I have mentioned many times in this series of sermons that the Apostle John is writing to people who are well acquainted with injustice.

These are people who are facing the threat of martyrdom every day.

They live in a time and place where the government, the religions, the culture around them are openly hostile to them.

For no other reason than that they are Christians they are losing their jobs, their homes, and in some cases their lives.

The injustices they are experiencing are testing their faith. Is God there?

In Revelation 13 we saw a description of that time in the tribulation when the antichrist and the false prophet, when the government and the dominant religion of the world would have absolute power over the world.

And in their intense hatred for God and his people, they would discriminate against them, deprive them of a way to make a living, and even kill them.

How could any Christian withstand that kind of pressure?
 What would keep them from abandoning Christ?
 Why wouldn't they just join the "winning" side?

Because they believe in the God of justice!
 Chapter 13 tells how hard it will be to be a Christian in the tribulation, but Chapter 14 declares that God and the faithfulness of his people will be vindicated - justice will come!

Let me tell you a story.

Apin Akot is a Christian man who lives in Sakobat, Sudan.

Three years ago when, one day, he was in the field with his two year old son, Muslim raiders, under the authority of the Sudanese government, raided his home and took captive his wife and two daughters, age 5 and 9.

To the government they were fair game because they were Christians.

They were raped, beaten, and herded like cattle many miles to the north where they were sold into slavery.

The five year old couldn't keep up on the journey north and was tied to a horse, cutting off the circulation to one leg and crippling her for life.

The father sold everything he had, traveled north and through risky negotiations bought back his wife and 5 year old.

But the nine year old was soon to be sold into prostitution and was too valuable for the father to afford.

He had to leave without her.

Folks, that is a true story, and it didn't happen hundreds of years ago but just recently. How do that Christian father and mother handle that?

Why does that not drive them to insanity or at least apostasy?

Forget Christianity - this is their daughter's life they are talking about.

But even if they converted to Islam - much of the damage has been done - The injustice is unfathomable - the pain unimaginable.

Doesn't such evil demand justice?

Would you dare say to that father "Well, that's life."

Friday night, I stood in the home of our dear friends and long-time Partners of this church - Clarence and Genevieve DeVries.

Clarence is near death.

I looked into the face of Genevieve as she sat quietly weeping in her wheelchair.
 The man to whom she has been married nearly 64 years was quickly dying.
 The pain she was experiencing was hard for me to grasp.

Death is evil.

It is not natural, it is the product of a sin saturated, fallen world.

Where's the justice?

Doesn't such evil demand justice?

Would you dare look into Genevieve's face and say, "Well, that's life."

With us this morning and living in our home is a three week old baby boy.

My wife Barbara brought him home from the prison hospital just after he was born.

Barbara and I look into the face of that helpless 6 pound baby and can hardly handle the thought of him going into the environment that is likely to be his future - one of neglect, drugs and who knows what else.

If that baby boy is abused - where is the justice?

Don't you dare say, "It happens to thousands, its too bad but that's life."

No, that's not life, that's evil - and such evil and those who perpetrate it demand justice.

I believe John is saying to his readers and to us:

When you live through such injustice,

when you see it happening in the world all around you,

when you are treated unjustly, when your loved ones are suffering,

when your heart grieves over the pain that evil inflicts on this world
 - remember justice will come!

Jesus is coming and he is carrying a sword, scythe, a sharp sickle to measure out justice.

But something in you says even if he does that, nothing could make up for the evil and suffering that so many have experienced.

I easily confess I don't know how it works but I believe our Bible declares that when Jesus comes and executes justice on this earth - we will stand in awe before him and willingly say -

"It was right - what you did and when you did it, Jesus, was perfectly right - justice has been served."

So persevere Christian - hang in there.

No matter how dark it gets - know that there is light.

No matter how long it takes - know He is coming.

No matter how great the injustice - justice will prevail and the whole world,
 most of all those who have been treated unjustly will say -
 "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.
 Just and true are your ways."

But hear me on one more issue before I close.

Where will you be when this justice is carried out by Jesus?

This issue is not an afterthought to the text.

To me it rings throughout this entire passage.

Who could help but think, "What about me? - Will I be cut down like so much grain, will I be trampled in God's winepress of wrath when Jesus comes again? Will I be thrown into the lake of fire?"

Listen to these most familiar words that speak directly to the issue:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

To believe in him means I repent of my sin and turn to follow Jesus Christ asking him and believing/trusting him to save me from the consequences of my sin.

The justice of God against my sin was met by Jesus himself on the cross.
 Jesus came and died to take the punishment for our sins.

And when Jesus comes again meting out justice I will stand in the shelter of his cross.

Where will you stand?

Jesus is coming again to bring justice on the earth.
 Is that, to you, a threat or a promise?

If it is threatening to you - God will remove that threat today and forever- if you'll ask Him.

Will you bow your head with me?

"Lord Jesus, give your people in this place a solid conviction that you are coming and you will vindicate their faithfulness.

Make us know beyond a doubt that no matter how unjust, evil and nearly unbearable are the circumstances - you are coming and you will bring justice.

Cause us to believe you so that no matter how hard it gets we will remain faithful - trusting you.

And Spirit of God will you please right now invade the minds and hearts of those who are here who have not yet invited you to forgive them, save them from your coming judgment, and be Lord of their lives.

Cause them to respond to you today - to accept your gift of life.

If you are one who has not invited Jesus Christ into your life, you have never intentionally and deliberately asked him to forgive you and give you eternal life will you pray these words after me, silently in your own mind:

Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner deserving your wrath.
I believe you died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin.
I turn away from my sin, I don't want to live the way I have been living.
And I turn away from trusting in myself to make me acceptable to you.
I trust only in your forgiveness based on your death for me.
I invite you into my life as my saving-Lord.
I trust you now to give me eternal life.
Thank you Jesus for giving me that life.

Jesus said, "As many as receive him to them he gives the right to be called the children of God."

If you have prayed that prayer from your heart, with meaning and intention, then you have become a child of God.

We want very much to rejoice with you in this new life Jesus has given you.
Would you please contact one of us pastors and let us help you grow in this new life.

If you have yet to make a commitment to Jesus and you would like someone to help you OR if you have need for prayer for some other issue in your life please come to the prayer hall immediately following this service and someone will help you.

If you are visiting with us today - I and other leaders of the church would like very much to meet you - please join us as the visitor reception center at the far end of the welcome center right after we dismiss.

