

Sermon – 21/10/2007 am

Grapes of Wrath

Study Text: Revelation 14:14–20

If you have ever been a farmer or just tried your hand at gardening you will know the need for patience. You cannot plant seed one day and expect to harvest the next. You have to wait for the plant to germinate, to grow, to flower and then produce the food you want. The farmer has to watch his crop closely to see when it is ripe for harvest. He does not rush in before it is ready – he will get sour grapes. Nor does he leave it beyond the right time – he will get rotten grapes.

Jesus likened the kingdom of God to a crop that is sown (Mark 4:26f). A man sows seed that sprouts and grows by itself, and produces fruit. Then he takes his sickle to harvest the crop. *The harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels* (Matthew 13:39).

In a vision John sees one *like the Son of man* coming on a white cloud with a gold crown on his head and a sickle in his hand. He proceeds to harvest the earth. This is a vivid picture of the final judgment.

Just as the Amorites became ripe for judgment (Genesis 15:16), so the sins of the nations will reach their fullness and they shall become ripe for judgment (Daniel 8:23). The prophet Joel spoke of God's judgment as putting the sickle into the crop – and further of treading out the grapes in a winepress (Joel 3:13). God treading the winepress in wrath is a common picture of judgment in the Old Testament (Isaiah 63:3).

Command

With a sharp sickle in his hand Jesus is told in a loud voice to *thrust in your sickle and reap, for the time has come...the harvest of the earth is ripe* (14:15). The 'Son of Man' title comes from Daniel (7:13), and is clearly a reference to the Messiah, to Jesus Christ -as it is also in Revelation 1:13. The golden crown further points to this 'one' as Jesus. He is the King of kings, the Son of God who won the victory over sin and death, and over the one who has the power of death, that is the devil.

How come Jesus is instructed by an angel you might ask? Firstly, remember that angels are messengers. This angel came out of the temple. He came for the presence of God. He was sent by God with this message – *the time has come for you to reap* (14:15). Secondly, Jesus himself said he did not know when the Day of Judgment would be (Matthew 24:36). We may think that since Jesus returned to heaven he would know this, but he does not say so. What Jesus said is that the Father committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22) and that this judgment will be according to the will of God (5:30). If neither the angels nor Jesus know when the Judgment will come, how foolish for any man to think he knows.

A second angel came out of the temple in heaven also having a sharp sickle in his hand (14:17). Like Jesus, this angel was given a command by another angel, this time coming from the altar within the temple. The altar was probably the altar of incense. John previously saw the souls of the martyrs under the altar crying out for justice. He saw the prayers of the saints

coming up as incense before God. He saw an angel take fire from this altar and throw it on the earth in judgment (8:5). From the altar he now sees this angel come with *power over fire* and with a message to thrust in the sharp sickle (14: 18).

The harvest was undertaken at the command of God – and in response to the prayers of the saints (6:11). God determined that the earth was a ripe for harvest. He has set a day when he will judge this world. He will judge with righteousness. He will separate the weeds from the wheat; he will separate the sheep from the goats. The harvest image is often accompanied by that of a threshing floor or in this case with that of the winepress.

This world is proceeding inexorably towards this Day of the Lord. You are powerless to stop this progression. Do you have this great day in your vision for the future? Do you make your plans with this day in mind?

These days we are being brainwashed with the idea that we can slow down and even stop this move towards the end of the world. Al Gore wants you to join him in stopping the progress, but let Al Gore and every one on this earth know that God has set a day when **He** will judge the earth. God will judge the earth by the man He has ordained – and that man is not Al Gore. It is Jesus Christ of Nazareth. There is no stopping the clock dear friend. The only way to change your eternal destiny is to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Crop

Many divide this vision into two harvests – a harvest of the elect (14-16) and a harvest of the wicked (17-20). While it can be understood in this way notice that this is just one vision as indicated by the opening phrase *I looked/saw*. There does appear to be two harvests, or what some refer to as a ‘twofold harvest’, and there is no doubt that the second is that of the wicked, but what about the first harvest?

The nature of the first harvest is not so clear. In the light of the parable Jesus told we tend to think of this as a grain harvest, a harvest of wheat and tares/weeds. But all that we are told is that it is a harvest of the earth. If you say ‘what about the sickle’, then note that the sickle is also used for the vines. Moreover, in the parable Jesus told it is the tares that are the focus of the harvest – *therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age* (Matthew 13:40).

The second angel coming from the temple uses his sharp sickle to gather clusters of grapes, for the *grapes are fully ripe* (14:18) as determined by God. The Old Testament background to this vision is found in Joel 3. The harvest is followed by the vintage in Joel 3, and so it is in this passage. ‘As in the Old Testament so in Revelation, the two metaphors of harvest and vintage connote the thoroughgoing and definite judgment of sinners by the Lord’.

Completion of Judgment

What happens to wine grapes after they are harvested? They are taken and dumped into a large vat where they are crushed to expel the juice. In ancient times the vat was a hollowed out rock, and the pressing was done by people stamping their feet. *For the winepress is full, the vats overflow – for their wickedness is great*. So wrote Joel as he completed the picture of God’s judgment (Joel 3:13).

John saw the grapes of the earth thrown into *the great winepress of the wrath of God* (14:19). This is a picture of divine judgment, a picture of God treading the winepress in his wrath against the wicked. The image comes from the Old Testament and is seen again in Revelation (19:15) – *He himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

Some time ago on TV I saw a preacher standing in the valley of Jezreel declaring how blood – human blood – would flow to the depth of a horse's bridle down this valley in Northern Palestine. He is not the only one to take these verses literally. But this is a vision, a picture of the Judgment, not a literal record of it. Nevertheless 'while we do not take John's picture literally, it is certain he wishes to be taken seriously. Behind these horrendous images lies the reality that the eternal wrath of God rests on those who reject and oppose him and who make war on his people'.

The winepress was trampled outside the city, probably the holy city of Jerusalem. Blood flowed out to a depth of over one metre, and for a distance of some 300km (1600 stadia). It is interesting that the land of Israel stretches for some 300km from north to south, but the reference to a distance of 1600 stadia is probably symbolic. The number four symbolises the earth, while ten is a round figure or symbol of completeness – 4x4 x 10x10 gives 1600.

Conclusion

This sixth section of these interlude chapters (12-14) can be compared to the sixth seal, and the sixth trumpet, which also envisage the final judgment or Day of Judgment. It is distressing to read renowned Bible teachers writing the 'future day of the Lord which unleashes God's wrath falls into two parts'. Only one Day of the Lord is spoken of in the Bible. This writer was of course referring to the end of the Tribulation, and then the end of the Millennium – two 'Days of the Lord'?

The picture of a sea of blood, of human blood, is not at all pleasant and one which men want to water down or even remove from the Bible. But remember the martyrs under the altar. They prayed, as many do today, for justice, and for God to avenge their blood. Do you worship a God who turns a blind eye to wickedness, to injustice and oppression? Do you worship a God who does not listen to the cries of his people?

When Jesus came into this world 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' he wore a crown of thorns. He came to die; he came to save sinners by grace through faith. When Jesus comes again he will be wearing a golden crown and carrying a sickle in his hand. He will judge the earth, gathering the wicked into his winepress where they will suffer the wrath of God forever and ever.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon