

Revelation

*Part Forty-One
His Father's Name
(Revelation 14:1-5)*

With Study Questions

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7/24/2022*

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Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. ² And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. ³ They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. ⁴ These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among* men, *being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. ⁵ And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God (Revelation 14:1-5).

Introduction

Earlier this year, in the city of New Orleans, a new statue was erected. The name of the statue is *Sentinel*, but the erecting of the statue actually inaugurated the image of *Mami Wata* in the popular Louisiana city. This became national news because Sentinel replaced the Robert E. Lee statue which had been in that location. It was thought that Robert E. Lee had stood as a monument for power, domination, tyranny and white supremacy and it was appropriate to counter that message with Mami Wata.

This new image, which is a naked, spoon-shaped female statue engulfed by a serpent, is a water deity and a symbol of status in the Zulu culture. Apparently, in an effort to declare the evils of hierarchies established by the Lee monument, the sculpture is not on a pedestal but on the ground-closer to the individual.

I do recall being routinely criticized to think that Paul's words in the first chapter of Romans could possibly apply to the modern, more sophisticated and educated citizen. His words:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things (Romans 1:22, 23).

Of course, as Calvin said, “the mind of the natural man is an idol factory.” And this idolatry generally involves the thoughts behind whatever false images represent. The Psalmist puts it this way:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. ⁵ They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. ⁶ They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. ⁷ They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. ⁸ Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them (Psalm 115:6-8).

We would be foolish to underestimate the significance of this statue in our midst. Especially since the artist will represent the U.S. in the very prestigious *Venice Biennale* art exhibit. But some basic questions are worth asking.

What is the mechanism by which the Mami Wata informs me that abusive power, self-seeking domination, tyranny and white supremacy are actually wrong? I believe the Scriptures teach these things to be sinful in black-and-white propositions that anyone can read and know. The artist sought to help the image communicate by not placing it on a pedestal, but that’s the artist’s message, not Mami Wata’s. How does Mami Wata convey that which is good and righteous?

And what sacrifices does this deity require? Virtually all deities require a sacrifice, one way or another-many of them human sacrifices. It is not uncommon for people to decry all the sacrifices the God of the Old Testament required. But these sacrifices were all types and anticipatory of God’s own sacrifice in sending His Son. What is the vehicle by which Mami Wata redeems sinners?

Much more can be said at this juncture, but we must move on. I will end this introduction with what I think to be an appropriate quote from G.K. Chesterton:

When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything.

I open with this introduction because what we read as we enter chapter fourteen is a juxtaposition of Rome and its claims of divine sovereignty against the true Lamb of God **“standing on Mount Zion.”**

In our five verses today, John records what he sees, what he hears and what he identifies. First, what he sees.

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

What He Sees

John had felt the force of the iniquitous trinity of the dragon, the beast of the sea and the beast of the land. The beast of the land appeared as a lamb but spoke as a dragon. It was a demonic government being promoted by a demonic religion. This environment demanded allegiance through threat of death. To be sure, many of them would die (Revelation 13:15). They were **“being killed all day long...regarded as sheep to the slaughtered” (Romans 8:36).**

Chapter thirteen crescendos with a description of the overwhelming power and authority of this darkness. The power to perform great signs; the construction of some type of speaking image; and the warning that failure to acknowledge the state as the pinnacle of all authority would jettison you from that which was necessary to survive in their culture (Revelation 13:17). That acknowledgement was presented by way of taking the mark of the beast on the right hand or forehead which symbolized to whom you would bow and who you would serve.

Chapter thirteen sounds overwhelming. Until you read chapter 14.

John does not see a false, lying lamb, but the true Lamb. And He is standing on **“Mount Zion.”** Mount Zion came to symbolize the heart and hope of God’s children. It is His true church. It is the church we come to fellowship and worship with every Lord’s Day.

In his efforts to strengthen the Hebrew Christians in the midst of apostasy, the author of Hebrews seeks to direct the hearts of the saints to the celestial nature of our worship, where we are not merely worshipping with one another in a provided building or gathering of struggling Christians. It is much more than that. Our minds are to be swept heavenward in this gathering. For we have come...

...to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24).

It is not stretch that say that the intimidating presentations of the power of Rome in chapter thirteen pales in comparison to the **“Lamb standing Mount Zion”** found in chapter fourteen. O, that the eyes of our heart could merely begin to perceive that heavenly Jerusalem.

And the Lamb does not stand alone, but with **“one hundred and forty-four thousand.”** He is accompanied by that innumerable number of redeemed (Revelation 7:4, 9). They do not have the mark of the beast, but rather the **“Father’s name written on their foreheads.”** This is no mere tattoo. It is a seal or mark indicating to whom they belong. The faithful reading this letter, to this very day, should count themselves among that number.

As our Lord prepares our hearts for the difficulties and tribulations which will inevitably beset us, let us recognize the formidableness of those powers by which we are surrounded and supported. Whether the antagonist is an ancient government or a modern one; an illness or potential destitution; economic or social collapse; mental or psychological vulnerabilities; these all pale in comparison to chapter fourteen.

Anyone who has nurtured and sought to advance an intimacy with the God who beckons us to call Him Father, while He yet remains Almighty, can take rank with John Laird Mair, on who’s grave in Westminster Abbey it is written.

He feared Man so little, because he feared God so much.

I believe this sentiment is the intent of the verses before us. What does John now hear?

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. ³They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth (Revelation 14:2, 3).

What He Hears

The speakers of heaven are now at maximum volume. It is **“like the voice of many waters...and...loud thunder.”** We read of **“harpists”** and the singing of a **“new song”**. These are expressions of praise for God’s victory and the coming of the Messiah (Psalm 33:3; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10). The scene is powerful and intimidating.

I am not saying there isn’t a place for the more gentle, romantic sounding, and psychologically soothing melodies in worship. But this strikes us as something different.

Many years ago, I was on a track and field tour in New Zealand and lived for a bit with a Māori family. I recall being exposed to the rugby Haka war dance¹. In that song and dance, a team of powerfully menacing athletes blast their intentions for victory prior to the contest. If you’re not on the team, you don’t join in. If you are on the team, you’re fully committed. It’s a song of battle.

At the risk of going back even further, in the World War II classic film, *Casablanca*, there is a scene where the Germans occupants are in a club and begin singing *Die Wacht am Rhein*, which is a German patriotic anthem. At great risk, the French refugees in the club counter this with their own anthem, *La Marseillaise*, which is the national anthem of France.

The director found it fitting, as the French proceeded to out-sing the Nazis, to show a closeup of a woman who had been portrayed in the movie as a woman with a questionable reputation. In that brief closeup, she sang with the kind of passion which could only proceed from someone with a history-a story. It was a thoughtful scene. *Casablanca* was not a musical and this was not remotely a concert and was much more than a sing-along.

Years ago, we had a deacon, Clay Atkinson, who has now gone to be with the Lord. One Sunday, as he was presiding over the offering, he included in his prayer something I don’t think I had ever heard. He said, something to the effect, “Lord, may this offering be our protest against all that is dark in this world.”

I am not suggesting that all of our songs should revolve around battle or protest. But sometimes our battle is against our own lethargic flesh and our protest is to sing with exuberance against that apathy. Perhaps there is not enough history of behaving like a true Christian to excite our commitment as

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiKFYTFJ_kw

we engage in worship. Or perhaps it is a stunted grasp of the holiness of the God whom we serve.

The **“four living creatures”** might beckon our minds to the sixth chapter of Isaiah. It is there that we read of the threefold refrain of the holiness of God. What do we suppose it sounded like when Isaiah found himself in the throne-room of God? One thing I’ve always marveled at in that account is how Isaiah doesn’t join in the worship. It would be like me bringing my ukulele and seeking to play along with the Philharmonic. But a lack of skill wasn’t really his problem.

Our passage says, **“no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand.”** I don’t take that as some type of learning disability. Similar to what we read in Isaiah, that lack of ability to engage in true worship is due to our own sinful condition.

And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5)!

Of course, the redeemed one hundred and forty-four thousand have learned the song. We generally don’t think of worship as a privilege. Little doubt, if we were in this throng of worship and incapable of joining in, it would be a time of immense sorrow. How can we be allowed? John identifies those allowed to worship.

These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among men, being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. ⁵ And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God (Revelation 14:4, 5).

What He Identifies

This hardly sounds like the easy-believism of *say a prayer and go to heaven*. The identification of those who have been given the pleasure and privilege of singing this new song seems to be laden with attributes of virtue. They are chaste and will follow Christ wherever He made lead. There is **“no deceit”** in their mouths and they stand without **“fault before the throne of God.”**

Yet in the midst of these virtues, we read, not of something they’ve achieved, but something achieved for them. **“These were redeemed”** and are

the **“firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.”** And one would be hard-pressed to find a notion less biblical than the ability for any person to stand **“without fault before the throne of God.”**

Even the idea of virginity in this passage, it is argued by many able commentators, is the result of God’s imputed righteousness, addressing a spiritual faithfulness over religiously adultery-this being a common theme in Scripture.

For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Christ gave Himself for His bride...

...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27).

Even still, let us realize that when the Scriptures include virtues among those who are saved, it is not necessarily saying that it was on account of those virtues that they are saved. May the grace of God never be a license for sin (Galatians 5:13).

Simply put, what John identifies in this passage are those who have acknowledged and trusted in (as in many member vows) Jesus as Savior and Lord. It is these who, though they may daily face the trials of a fallen world, will be seen by God as those **“without fault before the throne of God.”** With the truth of this firmly planted in their hearts, they would maintain their Christian perseverance through tribulation. Let us seek the same.

Questions for Study

1. Discuss idolatry. How easy is it to fall into this trap? What are our weaknesses when it comes to this (pages 2, 3)?
2. Compare chapter thirteen of Revelation to chapter fourteen. How do the two compare? How do we access that which is taking place in chapter fourteen (pages 4, 5)?
3. What does John hear in verses two and three? How does this inform us regarding worship (pages 6, 7)?
4. What needs to happen in order for us to truly engage in worship (pages 7, 8)?