

“No Rest for the Wicked” **(An Exposition of Revelation 14:6-13)¹**

Introduction

When was the last time that you heard a sermon on the subject of hell? Or the wrath of God upon sinners? Our text this morning confronts us with the uncomfortable and unpopular truths of the the final judgment, the sobering reality of Hell, and the eternal punishment of the unrepentant and unbelieving.

These truths are very much neglected in our day. Many preachers seem to *avoid them like the plague*. In his book, *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer writes,

“The fact is that the subject of divine wrath has become taboo in modern society, and Christians by and large have accepted the taboo and conditioned themselves never to raise the matter. We may well ask whether this is as it should be, for the Bible behaves quite differently. One cannot imagine that talk of divine judgment was ever very popular, yet the biblical writers engage in it constantly. One of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigor with which both Testaments emphasize the reality and terror of God's wrath.” (p.149)

The Bible really *does* behave quite differently in that regard. And that should be instructive for us in the church. The job of a preacher and pastor is to make **“the whole counsel of God”** known (Acts 20:27). To fail to do so is to *fail* to be **“innocent of the blood of all men”** (Acts 20:26, NASB).

Because the Scriptures themselves *so often* warn of the judgment to come, the reality of hell and the eternal torment of the unrepentant, it is *impossible* to make the whole counsel of God known without clearly teaching these truths.

On the need to emphasize in our preaching the realities of God's just judgment and wrath, John Murray (1898-1975) writes,

“It is this note that will impart to the message of the gospel and to the demand for faith and repentance the urgency that is consonant with the desperate situation for which the gospel is the one and only provision. Our age needs the ministry that will make men tremble before the awful majesty and holiness of God, and in the conviction of the reality of his holy wrath.”²

What is missing from the preaching in our churches today more than the majesty and holiness of God? How much of what passes for preaching serves rather to entertain the masses, rather than to “make men tremble” before God?

We should be *far more* concerned that our hearers have offended God than that we might give offense to our hearers by making God's truth known in love.

Despite the unpopularity of such preaching among even professing Christians, and the ridicule and scoffing of many skeptics and unbelievers who deride such preaching as “fire and brimstone” sermons, *we must not try to be wiser than God*; we must make God's truth known, and trust that He will use it to build us up in the faith and to convert the lost.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

² *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 1, p.145

The Messages of the Second and Third Angels

Last Sunday we looked primarily at Revelation 14:6-7, where we saw that the first angel had **“an eternal gospel to proclaim”** (v.6). Before the pronouncement of judgments so soon to follow in v.8-11, the offer of mercy is held forth to those who would repent and turn to Christ for salvation.

In v.8-11, however, the next two (2) angels pronounce messages of judgment in rapid succession. It is as if the rapid succession of these angelic announcements following right on the heels of one another is meant to emphasize for us *the urgency of the message of the gospel*, and the shortness of time that we have to heed its message and turn to Christ by faith.

Fallen, Fallen Is Babylon (v.8)

The *second* angel speaks of *the fall of Babylon*. In v.8 John writes,

“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.*” (Cf. Rev. 18:2)

This echoes the words of Isaiah 21:9, which says,

**“ . . . And he answered,
“*Fallen, fallen is Babylon;
and all the carved images of her gods
he has shattered to the ground.*””** (Italics added)

In pronouncing judgment upon *Babylon*, the second angel’s message also echoes that of the prophet *Jeremiah* (found in Jeremiah chapter 51). As mighty and fearful as ancient Babylon seemed in her day, and as much suffering that she inflicted upon the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah in taking her into captivity around 586 B.C., *her fall was sure to come*, for God would judge her.

Now the message of the second angel in v.8 is certainly *not* referring to the literal earthly kingdom/city of Babylon, which had long since passed on from the stage of world history.

Rather, Babylon here is a *symbol* or *sign*, perhaps of an earthly city or nation in John’s day (whether Jerusalem or Rome), or even in a more general sense as representing the ungodly influence of worldly nations and systems that stand in opposition to Christ and His church.

In the same way that ancient Babylon was judged and destroyed for her wickedness and idolatry, even so all earthly nations and systems that oppose Christ and persecute and tempt His people are doomed to destruction. As Psalm 2:9 says, the Lord Jesus Christ (God’s anointed King) will **“shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”**

This is certainly intended to *encourage the suffering church*, not only in the first century, but in *our* day as well, and even until our Lord’s return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

The sufferings of God’s faithful people do *not* go unnoticed; and those who would dare to hurt the apple of God’s eye will *not* go unpunished. As Jeremiah 51:56 tells us, **“the LORD is a God of recompense; he will surely repay.”**

The Wrath of God Upon the Worshipers of the Beast (v.9-11)

The *third* angel also announces with a loud voice another message of judgment that is sure to come, not just on wicked nations and worldly influences that oppose Christ, but also on all *individuals* who persist in unbelief and unrepentance.

In v.9-11 John writes,

“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, 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. 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 imagery of *worshipping the beast and receiving its mark* points us back to the previous chapter (Revelation 13). This language may seem a bit odd to us, but we must remember that these images are *signs or symbols*, intended to represent something else.

Worshipping the beast and receiving his mark is *a picture of unbelief and idolatry*, for worshipping and serving anyone or anything *other than* the one true and living God. *That* is why back in v.7 the first angel called upon all people to **“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.”**

Those who refuse to repent and turn to God through faith in Jesus Christ will experience the wrath of God in such a way that is scarcely imaginable, and *horrifying to contemplate*. The angel speaks of it as **“the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger”** (v.10).

People sometimes casually speak of something as being “hell on earth.” But there has never been such a thing. The worst calamities, the most horrific evils ever known on this earth, as awful as they were, are not worthy of such a title.

God *does* reveal His wrath against all unrighteousness *in this life*. Romans 1:18 tell us,

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

But no one in this life has ever known the wrath of God **“without mixture”** (KJV) or **“poured full strength.”** In this life God's wrath is mixed to some degree with mercy and grace. As the Lord Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:44–45,

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Italics added)

We simply cannot comprehend what the unmixed, full fury of the wrath of God will be like for the unrepentant. No one can. In hell all of the tokens of God's mercy and kindness will be stripped away forever. It is a truly frightening thought.

The reality of the wrath of God and hell is here described as being **“tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb”** (v.10). Revelation 19:20 also speaks of **“the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.”**³

What are we to make of this? Is Hell *literally* a **“lake of fire”**? If it is, it is unlike any fire we have ever seen or imagined. As the great Puritan writer, Thomas Watson puts it, “What is all other fire [compared] to this but painted fire?”⁴

The wrath of God unmixed in Hell makes all earthly fire look like a mere painted picture that does not burn at all.

And this torment in Hell will go on **“forever and ever”** (v.11). Just as the first angel brought a message of an **“eternal gospel”** that promised *eternal life* to all who believe, even so this third angel brings a message of *eternal torment* to the unrepentant. As if to make this even more clear, we are told that **“they have no rest day or night”** (v.11).

As Isaiah 57:21 says, **“There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”** There is no rest for the wicked, not in this life, and certainly not in death.

But those **“who die in the Lord”** are **“blessed indeed”** because they **“rest from their labors”** (v.13). And **“their deeds follow them”** (v.13), not to condemn them, but to be graciously rewarded for them by God! *What a blessing to be in Christ!*

Some teach that God's wrath will involve the complete annihilation of the wicked, so that they will simply cease to exist. The Scriptures simply do *not* teach this. That is wishful thinking. That is a delusion.

As has been said many times, every sin is an infinite offense, because it is committed against an infinitely holy God. And an infinite offense brings with it an infinite debt of wrath and punishment. That is one of the reasons why hell goes on forever and ever.

Now think again of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 John 4:9–10 says,

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Christ was **“the propitiation for our sins”** (v.10). What does that word (*propitiation*) mean? Propitiation means *to satisfy or pay the full justice and wrath of God for sin*.

Brothers and sisters, when you read a passage like this one, which speaks of the wrath of God, and of the eternal torments of Hell, see how the love of God was made manifest toward you in Jesus Christ. See what Christ endured in your place to reconcile you to God!

This is what we confess whenever we recite *the Apostles' Creed* together, saying, “He descended into hell.” As *Heidelberg Catechism* Q/A 44 teaches us, Christ's sufferings, “especially on the cross, hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell.”

³ See also Revelation 20:10.

⁴ *A Body of Divinity*, p.153

Conclusion

No one likes to hear of the judgment to come, the wrath of God, and hell, but the Scriptures clearly testify to these things. And passages like this one in Revelation serve as both an *encouragement to believers*, and a *warning to the unrepentant*.

Have you repented of your sin and turned to Christ by faith? Jesus alone is our refuge from the wrath of God that we all justly deserve for our sins. As Psalm 2:12 tells us, **“Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”**

Brothers and sisters, let texts like this one teach us to call on sinners to *repent and turn to Christ* while there is yet time. As Paul says, **“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”** (2 Corinthians 5:11, KJV)

And let texts like this one remind you of the greatness of the grace of God toward you in Jesus Christ, that He would send His only-begotten Son to pay the price for Your sins and mine on the cross, that we might be reconciled to God. - *Amen*