

THE WOMAN, THE DRAGON, THE BEAST, AND THE LAMB

Revelation 14

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Revelation 14:1-20 (NIV)

“Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.’

A second angel followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and

his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’ This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’

‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.’

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one ‘like a son of man’ with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, ‘Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, ‘Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe.’ The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.”

I. This is Act 3 of the drama begun in Revelation 12, *The Woman, the Dragon, the Beast, and the Lamb*.

One of the most unforgettable Christmas messages I have ever heard was given by an Episcopalian minister. He took as his text the phrase from the gospel of Luke “The child grew,” and the title of his message was “The Baby Grew Up.” At Christmas when we see pictures symbolizing the birth of the baby in Bethlehem there’s something very tender and precious. We

can come to the babe. We can be affectionate toward the baby. The world can somehow feel a little bit of gentleness and at ease with Christ as a baby. But the babe grew up. The Scripture reading we have from the hymnal this morning says “Unto us a child is born.” But by the time the reading is finished His wrath is poured out upon the wicked.

One of the things I think that Revelation 14, in fact this whole section of Revelation has been doing for me, preaching out of in the Christmas season, is reminding me that this babe didn’t get frozen in His nativity. That He had developed. That He grew up. That He is king. Against this baby, Revelation 12, remember the dragon tried to snatch the babe. The woman gave forth the manchild, but He was caught up to God and to His throne. The dragon missed his snatch. Then the beast, the Antichrist, and his false prophet came against the people of God. Only they are missing too. Revelation 14 takes us away from the scene of earth back up to heaven. It is the kind of spiritual reflection on Psalm 2 where the psalm is the song of kingly installation. When a king of Israel was installed this was the psalm that was read. “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One...The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ‘I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill,’” (Psalm 2:2,4–6, NIV). Of course, Zion is the temple hill in Jerusalem today as a physical entity. I think more may be involved, however, in this setting the king on the hill of Zion than simply something physical.

There are three distinct scenes that emerge in today’s Act 3.

II. The first scene is of the Lamb and of His people in chapter 14:1–5.

We’re immediately given a tip off of what happens to the people of God whenever they pass through trouble and through persecution, even if it’s the trouble and persecution of the end. For

the location of the people of God belongs with the Lamb on Mt. Zion. There are some deliberate contrasts here that are going on in John's mind as the Spirit equips him to write.

One is the fact that in Revelation 12 we have seen that the dragon stands on the sand of the sea. Remember as chapter 12 ended, in the King James Version it's the first verse of chapter 13 that mistakenly is "I stood on the sands of the sea." It's actually he. That is, the dragon stood on the sand of the sea. What's the dragon looking for? The false prophet. The Antichrist to arise from the teeming mass of humanity.

It's a comparison of someone standing on the mountain to someone standing on the beach. The impression that John wants to convey is that the devil at best stands upon sand and the Lamb at his best stands upon the mountain—supremacy. One is definitely way higher than the other. As the song we sing, "In Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand." That's the contrast that John has in mind here.

The big heavyweight championship of the universe as, it might be called, has in Revelation the Lamb versus the beast. It looks like what can the Lamb do with the power of the beast, the wild animal? But in the end the Lamb is on Zion, and the beast is on the sand.

So this is a reminder to God's people—to us—when we are going through difficulty to just remember we are headed for the mountain to assemble with the Lamb. I'm not sure in Revelation 14 that Zion is to be conveyed as a physical entity.

I think it is a spiritual symbol of the New Jerusalem. What is really being said here is that there is a Jerusalem above. There is a spiritual reality that is greater than the physical reality. For example, Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation is used some three times. Every time "Jerusalem" is used in Revelation it is used to describe the new Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven. Hebrews 12:22 says, "You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God." Where is

this Mount Zion that we as Christians have come to? Is it the hill in Jerusalem where the temple was located? No. The writer of Hebrews says you have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God. So in a spiritual sense we gather with the Lamb knowing that we too have an arbitrator in the heavens.

Some question may be raised about the identity of these one hundred forty-four thousand. I will make my view plain. I think the one hundred forty-four thousand is a spiritual reference to all of God's people of all ages from the first moment a person has faith in God to until the last person who has faith in God. It's that the total entity. I realize there are some persons who take the one hundred forty-four thousand to refer to the exact number of people who are going to be Jewish Billy Grahams during the time of tribulation. When we were in chapter 7, we dealt with this view. If you want a more extended discourse on this view you can go back to that chapter. What John is doing in Revelation 7 is seeing two multitudes. He's hearing the number "one hundred forty-four thousand" and when he turns to look he sees a multitude which no man can number who are singing the song of redemption. It's kind of a symbolic thing that's going on in the writing. It happened in Revelation 5. He heard Jesus being introduced as the lion. And when he looked he saw the Lamb. What he heard is "the lion," what he saw was "the Lamb." What he heard in Revelation 7 is the one hundred forty-four thousand, the people of God complete, no one missing. Perfect. Twelve times twelve. Twelve is always the number of the people of God: twelve tribes of Israel, twelve sons of Jacob, twelve apostles. Twelve times twelve multiplied by a thousand. It's a sure apocalyptic way, a Hebrew way, of saying "Here is the complete number of the people of God when they're perched on the edge of tribulation." Not only can it be the Great Tribulation of seven years, but I think the whole tribulation which began when Jesus said "in the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). When these people of God are perched on

their tribulation of life preparing to enter it, they are all numbered. God knows who His people are. And the drama of Revelation 14 is saying that at the end of that time you look and there are not one hundred forty-three thousand nine hundred ninety-nine—somewhere someone didn't get through. But Jesus brings all of His people, perched on the edge, through the time of travail, whatever that travail is, to be with Him. He loses none of His own.

This is specifically what Jesus says in John 10 “My sheep hear My voice.” It is the same imagery. The lambs gathered with the Lamb on Mount Zion. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand” (John 10:27–29, NIV).

So Jesus is saying “my sheep” and they also know the identity of His Father. Here in Revelation 14 those who are gathered to the Lord have on their forehead the mark of Jesus and the mark of the Father.

I think we probably make a mistake in chapter divisions and especially a mistake probably reading chapter 14:1 after 13:18. They ought to be continuing. They were in the original. There's a deliberate contrast made between the mark of the beast, which is the number of man, and the mark of Jesus and of the Father. One might well argue that the marking of the child of God is simply this: The Lord knows those who are His. They bear His mark and His seal. What is being described as the sealing of the people of God on their forehead is the fact that when we come to Jesus Christ we're not branded like you brand cattle. But in our spirit, deep within us in our consciousness we are branded with the nature and the identity of Jesus. If we don't have that brand then we are branded with the number of man. We're doomed to think like a man, to act like a man, to not realize our destiny as the children and the people of God. So the identity of

God's people, with the Lamb on Mount Zion. While it may perhaps refer to a specialized group in the tribulation, I think it could be more liberally understood, symbolically expressed of all of God's people. He keeps His own.

This may bother us. Especially if we've not been around the viewpoint that Jesus can keep His own. Can Jesus really mean me here? Can it be that He has lost none of the one hundred forty-four thousand of which I am a part?

Verses 1–5 go on to tell us of the characteristics of the people of the Lamb. John is doing this as the Spirit leads him not so much to give us some prophetic scenario of the future, but to help the saints who are reading this now to say, “Am I one of the one hundred forty-four thousand? Am I one of these followers of the Lamb?” John, as the Spirit is equipping him to write, says “The followers of the Lamb, whether on Mount Zion or on earth, are surely marked by these characteristics. They're marked with His and His Father's name. Just as when a bride is married she takes the name of her husband, at least in most situations and cultures. Or when a child is born the child takes the name of its parents. So we when we come to Christ we take His name. We are branded by His identity upon our life.

There's also another quality of those who are with the Lamb on Mount Zion. They sing a new song before the throne. This new song was a theme introduced in chapter 5. There are two songs in Revelation. One song is the song that gives God praises as the Creator. It is an eternal song. The new song though is the song that gives the Lord praise for saving us at Calvary. The new song is the song of redemption. When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, for example, they sang a new song. What was that new song? God has safely delivered us from Pharaoh. Why was it new? Because they'd never had an experience like that before. So the people of God were able

to sing a song that nobody else in heaven can sing. It is new, and it is a song that is taught them through the melodic and distinct voice of God himself.

The song of the redeemed probably has many verses to it. Each of us has a verse to contribute in the new song of redemption. The fact that you have the new song means you've had the experience of redemption. You know in your heart that Jesus Christ has saved you. It's difficult to imagine a believer who would not sing.

The first part of verse 4 is a rather difficult phrase. There is another quality of the people of God with the Lamb on Mount Zion. They are identified as these who have not defiled themselves with women for they are chaste or they are virgins. Those who take the one hundred forty-four thousand as Jewish evangelists during the tribulation period have terrible difficulty with this verse. They wind up spiritualizing it. One of the things that happens in Revelation, the people who take everything literally rather than symbolically try to do it consistently. But their only problem with that is every time the viewpoint gets stuck with a clearly symbolic passage they have to take it symbolically and that ruins the literalness they have been striving for. Basically, if you're to take the one hundred forty-four thousand literally what you wind up with is there are one hundred forty-four thousand eunuchs during the tribulation period. This verse also, if it's to be interpreted literally rather than symbolically, would have a very inferior view toward marriage. It would look upon the marriage relationship as something less than the will of God, which we know is clearly not the case from other parts of the Scripture.

However if we understand it symbolically we get quite a different picture of what's going on in this verse. In the Old Testament there are numerous times when Israel is called the virgin daughter of Zion. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:2 that he promised us to one husband—to Christ—that he might present us as a pure virgin to Him. Here Paul is using that term “virgin”

not in the physical sense but in the spiritual sense. When we think of the struggle that is going on in Revelation, the early Christians were being tested on two fronts. One front is the front of heresy which is asking them to have adultery with the sects which are growing up within the church. The other front against the Christians is persecution. What is being described here are the people of God who have kept their spiritual fidelity intact, who have both renounced the heresies within the church and who have stood firm against the seductive and persecuting tendencies by not adulterated their faith by trying to worship both God and mammon. These were spiritually pure.

This is a warning to believers not to yield to heresy or to persecution.

There is also another quality of these who are with the Lamb. That is the quality of total loyalty.

They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. You can almost visualize the Lamb on Mount Zion and He also is called the Shepherd of the sheep and wherever the Lamb-Shepherd goes, there the sheep go. So it's a beautiful picture of heaven that wherever Jesus goes we go.

But the writer of Revelation is meaning to say more than that. He's also saying that wherever the Lamb goes on earth, these people have followed Him on earth, that's why they're following Him in heaven. You don't follow the Lamb in heaven unless you followed Him on earth. The first call that Jesus gave to the disciples was "Follow Me." In fact in the first chapter of John's Gospel, the author of the Book of Revelation, John, is probably a teenager. He's impressed. He's with Andrew. Jesus says, "Follow Me. Come and see." John says it was about the tenth hour or 4:00 in the afternoon when he began to follow. All these years John has followed. He followed the Lord to the cross. He followed Him to the Resurrection. He followed Him to the Mount of Ascension. He followed Him through the great Pentecostal experience and the birth of the church. He followed Him into dispersion into the world. He followed Him to Ephesus where he

became the pastor of the church. He followed Him to Patmos where, as an old man, he has become an exile. And soon he is to follow Him into Zion itself. He has followed the Lamb wherever the Lamb went. His compatriots in the faith have also followed the Lamb. Some have not followed Him into exile. Some have followed Him into death and martyrdom. The characteristic of a Christian is to follow Jesus.

In the Scripture, in the gospel of Mark, Jesus called His disciples to Him and from them He chose twelve who were appointed apostles whom He appointed to cast out demons, and to preach the good news. There were three elements of that call. He called them to be with Him. He called them to cast out demons or to do mighty works. And He called them to preach the gospel. In the kingdom with the Lamb on Mt. Zion there's no need to proclaim the gospel because Jesus is there personally. The days of proclamation are over. The days of worship have begun. There's no need to cast out demons or do any works of healing because nobody's sick and nobody's possessed. But the one thing we can do in heaven that we have done on earth is follow Jesus. The call "Follow Me" is a call which keeps on going and going and going. We pick it up when Jesus says "Follow Me." We don't know where it's going to lead us. John had no idea it would eventually lead him to Patmos and then beyond to Zion. We have no idea where the call of Jesus might be leading us. But the children of God who are part of the complete number of God's people, the one hundred forty-four thousand are marked by the fact that when Jesus speaks, when He says "Follow Me," they go wherever He goes.

Have you earnestly sought the Lord's will for your life? He may through prayer and meditation be saying something very special to you that you would never hear except if you're really seeking him. Have you sought His will for a life partner or whether or not you should be

married? Are you following the lamb wheresoever He would go in your life? In our family relationships do we walk in the Lamb's steps? Jesus is calling us to total loyalty to the Lamb.

A fifth characteristic of those who follow the Lamb is their true confession of faith, verse 5. "In their mouth no lie was found for they were spotless." We must always cross reference a Scripture like this with 1 John "If we confess our sin He's faithful and just to forgive us our sin." This does not mean that the redeemed are such that they never speak wrongly or act wrongly. We always have an advocate with the Father in the heavens.

What this verse though is saying is a deliberate contrast of the lying that's gone on in chapter 13 and the deception that the antichrist and the false prophet have imposed upon worship. The character of worship of anything other than Jesus is built upon deceit. As Christians we say the religions of this world are built upon deceit. They come as man's attempt to find God, not as God's revelation to man. But the one who has his faith in Christ makes a true confession. We do not speak a lie when we say Jesus is the Lord. We do not speak a lie when we say those who have believed in their heart and confessed with their lips the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. In Revelation 12 and 13 the Antichrist attempts to jar us away from that confession of faith but fails.

We go over these points and we ask ourselves these questions: Are we part of the redeemed company with the Lamb on Zion? Are we marked with His or His Father's name? Are we singing already the new song? Are our lives marked by a spiritual loyalty toward Jesus Christ? Do we have a total loyalty toward Him, which says, "I will follow You Lord?" Is our confession of faith a true confession of faith or are we saying to Jesus "Yes" and "No" at the same time? Paul says that those in the church should hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience. That is to say, not saying simply from the lips, "Jesus is Lord" and not really meaning it.

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion which cannot be moved. It abides forever.

Isaiah 51:11 says, “The ransomed of the LORD shall return to Zion with singing, everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” We’re marching to Zion. Beautiful Zion!

That’s one picture that is in this Act 3 of the final drama between the Woman, the Dragon, the Man Child, the Beast, and the Lamb.

III. The second scene that unfolds before us are the final calls to the unconverted in verses 6–11.

I remember as a child being called for dinner. I’d be out on the school playground. There were occasions that I didn’t hear the first call, not so much from my parents’ weakness of voice but from my desire to stay a little bit longer on the playground. The second call would be a little louder until I knew the tenor of the voice had reached a certain decibel level that required my instant obedience or else. There is that kind of calling that is going on here. After all the other calls of the proclamation of Jesus Christ have had their force in the earth, God still through some last and final calls is attempting to reach mankind.

Three angels announce calls. The first angel announces the call to worship God as Creator. We know from the rest of the Scripture that angels do not preach the good news of Jesus and His resurrection. An angel can get Philip down on the road to witness to the eunuch but the angel himself cannot tell the eunuch about Jesus.

So this angel flies in mid-heaven with the eternal gospel. This is not the gospel in the sense that Jesus is born; Jesus has died; Jesus is risen. The eternal gospel appears related to the nature of God as Creator. What is being spoken of is in terms of worship “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and

fountains of water” (Revelation 14:7). It’s a fundamental call to acknowledge God as creator. It’s the scriptural way of saying the people are not open to receive Him as redeemer if they don’t even believe He’s creator. How can you accept Jesus as redeemer if you don’t believe there’s a God to start with? One of the great lies of our age is the attempt to put creation into a kind of a thing that was a process started by the distant past origins of which we do not know, and that all passes under the guise of respectability and intellectualism. Here the Scripture is saying when matters are at their worst God is still saying “Own up to Me as the Creator.”

There is then a second call that goes forth announcing the fall of Babylon. Babylon becomes very important in Revelation. In Revelation 17 we’ll deal with it more in detail. Babylon in the Scripture is introduced to us in Genesis chapters 10 and 11. It is the city where the Tower of Babel rises. The city called itself “Gate of God,” but, in a marvelous play on words, the Scripture reminds us of the place Babel—that is “He confused.” The city that called itself “The gate of God,” instead is really the place of confusion. Its founder Nimrod was a hunter. Babylon throughout history, whether it’s been literal Babylon or Rome or any nation that has arisen to conquer, has been preying on the masses. Nimrod’s name meant “Let us revolt.” At the very heart of man’s system against God is this picture of revolt. And the angel is simply saying that day is over: “Babylon has fallen.”

There has been a call announcing eternal punishment. Verses 9–11 state those who take the mark of the beast are eternally tormented. Some literal scholars have a terrible time in this point in Revelation. They call this section sub-Christian. Here’s where the author lapsed into thinking in terms of retribution. The true Jesus isn’t like this at all. Yet Jesus talked more about hell than anyone else in Scripture. He talked about hell-fire more than any one else in Scripture. The Cross of Jesus Christ is still an offense in the world. If by the Cross we mean than mankind’s condition

is so hopeless no one can be saved without the Cross then that Cross is an offense. If it's a pretty symbol that we wear around our neck, if the manger is kind of a nice Christmas event, there's nothing eternally attached to it that people are lost without it then it's no offense. But the reality exists that God came to save us from eternal loss and eternal torment.

I think there's some things we can say about this passage on judgment. We know what it is to hate big sin. I think we can understand something of our own anger toward sin if we look at God who is pure and dwells in unapproachable light. We only get angry usually at great big sins or when somebody does something really wrong to us. But God, who is pure and whose nature is not tainted with evil, is able in His own nature to hate vehemently the smallest sin as much and more strongly than we hate the biggest sin. Because His whole nature cries out in repulsion against sin, He's determined not to let it dwell in His presence.

The Lamb comes into the world because He knows the world is on fire. The holocaust comes and there will be a new heaven and an earth. Ours will melt with fervent heat. We look at Jesus Christ coming into the world and people argue saying Jesus shouldn't send anyone through this kind of experience of torment forever and ever. That's to misunderstand Jesus' rule altogether. The fact is when Jesus enters the situation the house is already on fire. He didn't start the fire. He came to rescue all those who will come out of the fire and follow Him.

We see, too, in this passage of Scripture the wrath of God, a wrath we have called judicial. It is the wrath which is experienced when a judge passes a sentence.

What is this "forever and ever in the presence of the holy angels and the presence of the Lamb?"

What is the meaning of this? When we look at the wrath of God we see that the torment is not occurring in the presence of the saints but before the Lamb and His angels. It is a judicial judgment that God pronounces upon the world. This judgment is used by John in another call to

the saints, knowing that the fire which is forever can consume and yet never consume. How little then should we be afraid of the fire of persecution that breaks now. Here is a call for endurance of the saints. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus said “Fear not him, who can harm the body but rather fear him who can cast both body and soul into hell.” John encourages Christians who are struggling toward Mount Zion that, if in the course of going to Mount Zion they are called to death before the Lord comes, blessed are those who die in the Lord.

IV. John concludes Acts 3 with a picture of the harvest of the earth, a harvest that comes to us in two figures.

A harvest of grain, verses 14–16, and the harvest of grace. The harvest of grain some have those simply to be the harvest of the righteous on the earth. It may be that the harvest is similar to that which Jesus spoke of in Matthew 13 where He calls the field the world and He says “At the end the Son of man will send His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all the causes of sin and evil doers and throw them into the furnace of fire.”

Jesus here compares the harvest to the gathering of wheat and the blowing away of the chaff. The harvest of grapes certainly is the figure of judgment. Blood flowing to the horses’ bridle serves to ascribe in a symbolic way the amount of carnage and devastation that occurs as the era of earth comes to a close. Probably here is a reference to Armageddon. But it may very well also represent worldwide conflict. The conflict takes place outside the city. The city in chapter 14 is Zion. And Zion is heavenly rather than earthly. Then outside the city is the conflagration that breaks out on earth. Blood flowing to the horses’ bridles, and running for 184 miles, which is literally the length of Palestine. But there’s sometime more in this figure as well for John likes to work symbolically with numbers. Four is the number of earth. Four multiplied by four, four

squared is sixteen. Sixteen multiplied by a thousand is sixteen thousand. John may be saying there's worldwide conflagration. Everyone is involved in the final harvest of the earth.

Phillips uses this to put before us what is involved in the harvest. Every year in the harvest fields of England there are thousands of little tragedies, Phillips says. The victims are the charming little creatures, the field mice. Earlier in the year the growing corn seems to them to be the ideal place in which to settle and to bring up a family. Food and shelter and building material are there in plenty. Everything seems perfectly adapted to their need. The forest of innumerable corn stalks is their whole world. In these corn stalks they court and play and mate and bring up families. Their happiness seems to be complete, until the harvest. For when the day comes for the owner of the field to reap his harvest, tragedy begins for the harvest mouse. The whole world of waving corn which seemed so snug and secure, so especially designed for comfort and nourishment comes crashing about his ears. The field, which he thought was his world, never really belonged to him at all. The fact that the growing corn was not meant for his food and shelter has not entered his tiny head. The life of the harvest mouse is not a bad picture for the way in which some people live in this world. They too work and play, court and get married and bring up children. In the happy times they believe that it is their world and that to believe in an eventual harvest is old-fashioned and silly. Yet our Lord as the Son of God has said quite plainly that this world is like a field that belongs to God and that it moves inevitably toward a harvest. This little world is not, as some imagined, a permanent thing at all. When God decides that his plan is consummated He will reap the harvest. The harvest is the end of the world. The field mouse is deceived because for months he is left to his own devices. He never sees the owner of the field and naturally knows nothing of the coming harvest. It is possible that we may allow ourselves to be deceived because God, the owner of the world, has not put in an appearance. And

for the purpose of the experiment we call life He does not interfere with man's power to choose. We may imagine that the field belongs to man and that there is no such thing as an eventual harvest. If Christ was God then His statement about this world being an experimental field with an inevitable harvest should surely be most seriously considered. No one could blame the little harvest mouse for not realizing the true purpose of the cornfield or the certainty of eventual reaping. But what are we, Phillips asks, mice or men?

Harvest comes. The child born in Bethlehem's manger grew up. He's the Lord of the earth. The Lord God Almighty has established Jesus on Mount Zion to rule and to reign. Scriptures say we are either with Him or against Him.

Closing Prayer

It is difficult, Lord, for us to look at this Scripture. For there's something of Your nature which beats in us strongly. It reminds us that You so loved the world that You gave Your only begotten Son that whoever believes on You should have everlasting life. We do not like to have to say those words "should not perish" but we recognize that as we come in obedience to You and Your authority that those words "should not perish" are part of understanding Your mission. That "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." That "there is no other name given among men under heaven whereby we must be saved other than the name of Jesus." We bow ourselves anew to You, Lord Jesus. We recognize that most of the way You call us is through mercy and through grace. The New Testament is filled with examples of preaching which remind us of the good news of the gospel and it is only when we have turned our hearts against that good news time and again that finally the announcement of judgments comes beating upon our ears as though You step up the tempo of the pounding on the door of our heart, that You might be blameless in our judgment and that You might be merciful in coming to us and offering us life. Who are You

speaking to, Lord Jesus, today? Who is that person who has resisted the gentle knocks of Your presence upon the heart door of his life. Today You come more insistently. On this Sunday before Christmas and in this Christmas time of year, may each of us from our heart own You as Lord and Savior and worship You as redeemer of the earth and sing before You the new song. We thank You, Lamb of God, that You have called us to follow You. We thank You that we can identify with You and be with You on earth, be Your people, the flock of Your pasture, the sheep in whom You take great delight, that one sheep even who strayed far from the fold who You went off a great way to get and bring back, the sheep who are coming with You to Zion. We praise You that we are Your people now and in the age to come. Keep our hearts stayed on You and our lives ever open to Your presence, Your rule, and Your authority. Through Jesus our Lord. Amen.