

Sermon series: the Book of **R e v e l a t i o n**

## **The 5 Most Exciting Minutes of Your Life**

Revelation 14

Today we are turning to the Book of Revelation, chapter 14. We'll start reading in verse one, Revelation 14:1 through verse 13.

John writes these words, *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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as first-fruits to God and the Lamb. <sup>5</sup> No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.*

*<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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."*

*<sup>8</sup> A second angel followed and said, "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."*

*<sup>9</sup> A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, <sup>10</sup> they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. <sup>11</sup> And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name." <sup>12</sup> This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.*

*<sup>13</sup> Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: 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'd like to start by asking you a question. I'd like to ask you to think for a moment of what were the most exciting five minutes of your life? Look back on your years as far back as you can. What were the most breathtaking, exhilarating, emotion-producing 300 seconds you ever experienced?

I'd like to ask you to take just about 20 seconds. Turn to the person next to you and tell them what the most exciting five minutes of your life were up to this point. About 20 seconds, real fast. .... (Okay, time's up. Did you get the whole story in?)

I think I could make a good case that if you'd been able to talk about it at the time, the most exciting five minutes of your life would be the very first five. Think about it for a moment. After nine months of darkness and isolation, you discover there's a whole world out there full of colors and tastes and sounds and sensations and other people. You discover you've entered into a realm beyond your wildest imagining.

I think if you could have talked, you would have said something like, "Mom, Dad, I had no idea! I actually had some reservations about leaving the womb. But now I see that this is a much better arrangement. I wouldn't have missed this for anything." I think it's very possible that the most exciting five minutes of your life so far were the first five minutes after you were born. It's just been all downhill ever since.

Those first 5 minutes are nothing compared to what's to come. The most amazing five minutes you will ever experience will be the first five minutes after you die. You think about that for a moment.

Century after century, the brightest minds that have ever lived have devoted whole lifetimes to try to discover what lies beyond death. And five minutes after, you will know.

You will experience what lies beyond this world. Those five minutes will happen for every one of us. That's reality. Think about the sights that you're going to see, the sounds that you will hear, the experience that you will have in your first five minutes of eternity.

Now, in the portion of God's Word that we are examining today from the Bible book of Revelation, chapter 14, John who wrote it is saying to you and me that for every human being those five minutes

are coming, and they will indicate an eternal destiny. Yours will be an eternal destiny of either indescribable joy or unspeakable loss.

In this chapter, God describes the state of blessedness that some people will experience, and the state of condemnation that some people will experience. We will talk about this, then we will think about how we should respond.

### **THE STATE OF BLESSEDNESS**

Let's start with the state of blessedness. Verse 13 has one of the great statements in all of Scripture. *"Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'"* Blessed are the dead.

This one statement turns death upside down. We in our world think of those who have died as being most unfortunate. We think of them as having run out of time to live. We think their best days were here in life on earth and now that's over. You never hear a television news account of somebody who died or read an obituary that begins with the word blessed. But for John, the word to describe those who have died in the Lord, in Christ, having put their trust in him, the word to describe them is blessed, fortunate, happy, because now they're really alive.

*"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."* In the first five verses of this chapter we get kind of a picture of the blessed, and I want to walk us through what it is that John says that condition is.

*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.*

John writes about the 144,000, and we've seen in past weeks that this is a symbolic way of talking about the people of God. It's all the people of God – not one is left out!

John says that Jesus' name and the Father's name are written on their foreheads. What is that about? Well, it's a kind of counterpart to the mark of the beast. We talked about how the number 666 which stands for the devil is written on the foreheads of people who want nothing to do with God. The opposite is also true. God writes His mark of ownership on His people who love Him. This is all symbolic language.

Back in the Passover, Moses was going to lead the People of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, and they killed a lamb, and used it's blood to mark their doorposts. God would see that blood – that mark – and in an act of forgiveness, death would pass over that house. The lamb would have died for them, so they could live, ... and then go to the Promised Land.

Jesus is the Lamb – the sacrifice for you. He died so you could be forgiven, and then go to the Promised Land of Heaven. His blood shed on the cross, is put on you – marks you – not physically or literally. But spiritually and symbolically. God sees this mark. Jesus' forgiveness is put on you, by faith. When you trust that Jesus' death was for you, His forgiveness marks you. God the Father knows this about you. He knows those who trust in His Son.

So the idea here of the mark on your forehead -- your thoughts and attitudes – are all about Jesus. Your thoughts and attitudes are all pure, because you've been forgiven. All your thoughts are about trusting Jesus and loving Him.

One of the things that has been striking me lately is how many thoughts I have that I wish I did not have, how many thoughts go through my mind I just wish weren't there. All of us struggle with wrong kinds of thoughts of one sort or another. Our thoughts are so full of sin! So messed up!

#### **YOU WILL BE PURE WITHIN AND WITH OTHERS**

Just imagine for a moment what it would be like to have no more judgmental thoughts or no more bitter thoughts. They just don't go on in your mind anymore. No more lustful thoughts. The day is coming when for the first time in your existence, you only think the wonderful kind of thoughts that Jesus would think: no anxiety, no wrinkled brows. No forehead is going to frown that has that name on it! No resentment, no frustration, no temptation. Don't you think that's going to be the most exciting five minutes of your life? You are going to be blessed.

And then John goes on, (verse two), <sup>2</sup>*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.* He talks about water, thunder and harps, what is that all about?

### YOU WILL BE PURE WITH GOD.

Well, as you know, thunder or rushing waters if you've been by the ocean are sounds of great strength, great power, a lot of volume. So that means that this would be a voice of great power. You're not going to miss that voice. But then the harp business, that's about beauty. What John is getting at is that those who are blessed will fully experience the power and the beauty of God. You'll hear his voice. God's voice is going to speak to you.

***<sup>3</sup> 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.***

Then John says that the blessed are so overwhelmed that they sing a new song. And this is beautiful. It's the only time in all of Revelation that a song is mentioned, but it's not quoted. All of the other times, the \_great words of praise are spelled out. Here it's not. It's mentioned, but it's not quoted. And the idea is that they have experienced God so fully that they must respond. It's such a glorious experience, and it fills them up so completely, we can't even guess at it. We don't know that song yet. We don't have words for that one yet.

Imagine those first five minutes when you hear his voice! Don't you think that will be the most exciting five minutes of your life?

Then in verse four he says about the blessed: ***<sup>4</sup> These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins.*** Sometimes it's translated pure, but it's the word that means virgin. Now that seems like bad news, doesn't it? Sometimes this was misunderstood in the early centuries. It was taken as an indication that for God, the purest form of living is chastity and that sexual experience even in marriage is somehow less holy.

That is not the meaning here. The point is not that God is down on sex. God's the One who came up with the idea of male and female. That is His creation. The point here is: All through the Old Testament, idolatry -- unfaithfulness to God -- was referred to as adultery against God, as unfaithfulness. They are "unfaithful to their God." It's not talking about sexual adultery; it's speaking about spiritual adultery.

So when John talks about the purity of the blessed here, he's talking about their complete faithfulness to God. Imagine those first five minutes when you find that in the state of blessedness you're simply incapable of being unfaithful to God. Your hands just naturally do acts of service. Your mouth just naturally speaks words of truth and beauty. I'm telling you, it will be the greatest five minutes of your life. And then the next five minutes will be greater. Then the next five will be greater, and that will be eternity.

### **THE STATE OF CONDEMNATION**

I would dearly love to be able to close this message right here. I'd love to be able to say that's the future of every person that's ever lived. But it's not. That is not the teaching of the Word of God. John says that for some the first five minutes will usher them into another reality all together.

Now friends, this gets very sobering, this vision of this other reality -- of the state of condemnation. Look at verse 10, <sup>10</sup> "...***They will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.*** Normally in John's day when wine was poured, it was mixed with water. Unmixed wine was quite rare and extremely strong, and that's the image that John is using here. They'll drink the wine of God's wrath poured unmixed, not diluted, into the cup of His anger.

These days many people are troubled by the thought of God being angry. And many people will say things like, "My God is a God of love, and not a God of anger." Friends, that's not the God of the Bible. The Bible has some quite serious things to say about the anger of God.

We need to understand God's anger. When we see anger expressed, it's almost always junked up, almost always. You ever see a two-year-old child throwing a temper tantrum? Your little angel screaming, kicking, flailing, laying down, refusing to move? Our anger is junked up, and it starts early!

Often when people think about God being angry, they project on to Him the worst characteristics of human anger, but that's not accurate.

God's anger is no temper tantrum. God is never out of control. God doesn't have a body. He doesn't have the kind of adrenalin

surges that we have. God does not experience unpredictable rage. God doesn't kick chairs or throw things. God's anger is not vindictive. It is not cruel. We need to be real careful not to project our human tendencies onto God. Yes, the Bible teaches that God is a real person with real feelings, and that includes real anger. His anger, however, is not all junked up like ours.

You know what? I don't want a God without anger. I don't want a God who could look at the Holocaust and experience no anger. I don't think I'd want a God who could look at a defenseless person being abused and not get angry.

The Bible says that God's anger is real, and it is a measure of the seriousness with which He takes sin, and that you discount God's anger or deny it at your peril.

Then John goes on to describe this state of condemnation. Look at verse 11: <sup>11</sup> ***And the smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever.*** He talks about the torment of fire and sulfur, and the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. Fire was used to purify something defiled – to purify sin. And in hell, sin cannot be purified and the fire just goes on and on and on.

#### **NOTHING GOOD CAN BE EXPERIENCED.**

This phrase about smoke going up is used a number of times in the Old Testament, and the image is of a conquered city that has been burned, and from a distance you see the smoke of that wreckage rising into the sky. Complete destruction of a community where once there were homes and schools and shops and children played, and people fell in love. Neighbors cared for each other, and now all of that is gone. All of that has been destroyed. In other words: there is no place in hell where people care for one another or celebrate together. God's dream for the human race is relationship – love for one another. Hell is the opposite of that.

I mention this because sometimes people will say things like: "Well, I don't think I would mind hell. All my buddies are going to be there. At least we'll be together." They picture it like a giant bowling alley where it's always Miller Time or something like that. That's not the reality God is sharing with you here! All the things that make relationship, love, caring possible are all gone. There is no humility,

no servanthood, no courtesy, no honesty -- these are all gifts of God, and they are completely absent. To reject God is to reject everything that makes relationships possible.

Just as heaven – (as we're going to see later on in this series) -- involves images like streets of gold and pearly gates to reflect the perfect community, perfect oneness, perfect intimacy, perfect belonging, so the image of hell is the mirror opposite. It's the image of a destroyed city. It's the end of all belonging, and all caring.

Imagine being so locked up in your own pride and self-centeredness that you become utterly incapable of relationship -- never knowing the joy of friendship, never knowing the goodness of serving and being served, never knowing a loving heart.

#### THERE IS NO RELIEF

Then verse 11 says: ***There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name.*** In other words, for those who are given over to evil, there is no rest. Think about this for a moment, friends, no relief, no rest from a guilty conscience. No rest from isolation. No rest from a purposeless existence. You experience it, and you know it will never end. No relief from self-centeredness, from boredom, from regret, from sadness, from the misery of sin, no rest day and night.

This is the state of condemnation, and it is real, and it is permanent, and it will happen to real people.

I want to ask you now, friends, imagine what it would be like to wake up to the first five minutes of *THAT*. Imagine what it would be to wake up for those first five minutes and then to know that you'll spend all the rest of eternity apart from God with that cup of wrath, utter aloneness, the smoke of their torment goes up, no rest day or night.

Friends, the very serious truth is: that is what we deserve. The truth of the Bible is that we fairly, rightly **DESERVE** the state of condemnation. We are sinful and we don't qualify to be in the presence of a holy, pure God.

The Bible says: ***"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"*** Romans 3:23 We've all sinned. Each one – broken our relationship with God. Pushed God out of our lives. And we deserve no relationship with God – God out of our lives, nothing good, no hope – FOREVER!



What's more is that you cannot fix this problem. Because you aren't perfect, and you can't make yourself perfect, sinless, and pure. **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"**

Yet, the good news – no, the GREAT news – is that God is not only a God of wrath, He is more a person of unspeakable, unbelievable amounts of love. God offers heaven to you as a gift because Jesus achieved it FOR you. That Bible verse goes on -- look at Romans 3:24: *"... All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**"* Romans 3:23-24

"Freely by His grace" -- the state of blessedness is yours, as a FREE gift. Not earned by you. Not deserved for you. God OFFERS heaven to you -- only because Jesus died on the cross to pay for all your wrongs and sins FOR you.

And FAITH – faith is RECEIVING this gift. Faith is – I give up on my DOING, and instead I trust what Jesus has DONE. Faith is letting what Jesus has DONE be applied to me.

DON'T REJECT Jesus! Don't reject Jesus' payment. Don't reject the love of the Father who gave Jesus for you.

How should you respond? Simple: **RECEIVE** heaven by **trusting Jesus' payment for you.**

And Faith or trust is not something you've got to DO, or work myself up into. Faith, too, is a gift from God.

The State of Blessedness OR The State of Condemnation? Which will it be for you? JUST BELIEVE God's promise of what Jesus has already DONE *completely* for YOU – and the State of Blessedness is YOURS!

That's why in Revelation 14, verse 6, John writes:

***<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>He said in a loud voice, "Fear God (respect Him, love Him back) 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."*** Rev. 14:6 & 7

And these people in heaven, they respect, and worship, and thank God – and that just flows out of a heart that filled with gratitude because they've received heaven as a gift from a loving God.

Friends, you can know today that this will be the first 5 minutes of your eternity. You can know with absolute certainty that you will enjoy this state of blessedness. God has promised that for everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ as their forgiver, this is their forever future. When you trust what Jesus has done for you, this is your 100% guaranteed gift that is waiting in heaven.

I just hope you'll also remember this: Everybody you know, every pair of eyes that you ever look on to, everybody that you work with, play with, live around, talk to, everybody is going to wake up to five minutes that will usher in all eternity. So you do everything you can. You pray and you work and you talk, and you develop relationships, and you invite. You do everything you can to help it be the right five minutes, the right eternity. That you share this loving Lord Jesus with everyone you can.

AMEN.