

Every good story has a moment of profound darkness. A moment near the end of the 2nd act when all hope seems lost. The hero's loved ones have been kidnapped. All the friends have left. The moment where you are the most nervous that this story is not going to have a happy ending.

Because it is right after this moment that the calvary appears. The moment when Captain America tells the Avengers to assemble. When Gandalf comes over the mountain at dawn of the third day. The dark moment before the heroes arrive. Before John Wayne rolls into town. Captain America tells the Avengers to assemble. Han Solo and the Millennium Falcon reappear to help Luke blow up the Death Star. Aslan comes back with the Narnians who were once turned to stone to defeat the White Witch. And my personal favorite is Gandalf coming over the mountain at dawn of the fifth day in the battle of Helms Deep.

We have spent a lot of time in the darkness. The last two weeks in Revelation 12 and 13 we have seen the Dragon, the antichrist, and the false prophet. We have seen how they will conquer the world and make war on the church. The people of God will be persecuted, oppressed, and killed. And all this darkness can make us wonder and doubt. It can make us question what kind of story we are in.

But now we come to the Lamb of God. The story of the last days is dark and full of terrors. But it has a happy ending.

I. The people of God will look to the Lamb.

We, the people of God, can trust the Lamb.

Yes, the beast will rage.

The antichrist will kill.

The false prophet will deceive.

When all looks lost, we can and we will look to the Lamb for salvation.

Look at verse 1.

"Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads."

The verse begins by telling us to look.
We need to look and behold.
You may have been asking where is God?
Why is He allowing the church to be defeated?
Why is the world being conquered by the dragon?
Why is so much wrong coming over the world in the tribulation?
Where is Jesus?

Well, if we would look.
If we would be able to raise our eyes.
Then we could look and see the Lamb standing strong.
He has not been defeated.
He is not absent or missing.
The Lamb is standing on Zion.
God is on His throne.

And we need to behold and look closely this morning.
See who it is standing on Mount Zion.
It is the Lamb of God.
Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain.
And He is presented here as the lamb.

The powers of evil are presented in terrifying terms.
They are the dragon.
The seven-headed beasts.
The powerful beasts and monsters with horns and power.
And to oppose them, we have a Lamb.
Something we use to decorate a baby's nursery.
And yet, this lamb will defeat the enemy.
Because He already has.
This is the child who defeated the dragon.

And He is who we are to behold.
Who should capture our attention and devotion.

The Lamb on Zion is who we should daydream about.
When our mind begins to wander, it should find its way to His door.

We notice the Lamb is standing on Mount Zion.
Why does it specify that mountain and place?
There is a purpose behind it.
And it is more than just describing a particular mountain.
Most of the time in the Bible, "Mt. Zion" does not refer to the physical hill in Jerusalem.
It is used to describe much more than that.
We still use Zion that was today.
Which is why people who are very pro-Israel might be called Zionists.
Because we recognize Zion is much more than a hill or mountain.
Sometimes it refers to Israel.
Sometimes it is a way to refer to the temple.
And sometimes it is used to refer to the heavenly place where God is.

That is what it means now.
This is the Lamb standing in the heavenly place.
The true heavenly Mt. Zion that the earthly mountain is based on.
And the Lamb is in Zion.

Let me say it another way.
There is a phrase we normally say to encourage each other.
We say, God is on the throne.
This image here of the Lamb is God in the heavenly place.
In the capital city of God.
In the holiest of holies,
Standing tall and in charge.
We do not have to fear anything the enemy does because we can see the Lamb.
He is standing strong and cannot be touched and cannot be defeated.

You are in a spiritual battle right now.

Maybe you feel like you are in the midst of one right now.
You will find yourself surrounded by the enemy.
Things will look dark and you can see no way out.
Your strength and your flesh may fail.
But if you could raise your eyes.
Look past your circumstances and look to Mount Zion.
And behold!
There you will see the Lamb who was slain.
The Lamb who lives.

And look who is with the Lamb.
He does not stand alone.
He is not overlooking as all His people are killed and no one survives.
He stands and with him are the 144,000.
The people of God are with their God.
We have talked about the 144,000 before, but it has been a while.

Some believe that this group of people is an exact number.
That it is literally and exactly 144,000 people from the tribes of Israel.
They are saved during the tribulation and are given special powers and special spiritual status from God.

This is partially the Jehovah's Witnesses' misunderstanding.
They take it far too literally.
They go so far to say that the literal 144,000 are the only people in history who will be resurrected and rule with Jesus.
The Mormons will say these are the high priests in their religion.

Others will say the 144,000 represents all believers throughout history.
They will just say it is symbolic language to describe us right now.
And the 144,000 are just the generic people of God.

I am kind of somewhere in between.
I do believe this number is talking about a specific group of God's people.

I think it is the people of God who endure the tribulation.
I don't think it has to be exactly that number.
Because it is 12 12,000's from the tribes.
Which seems to be more talking about the completeness of God's people.

And I don't think this passage is meant to just tell us about them.
It is not like God wrote this so that one day we could know what it will be like for some people way off in the future.
If that was it, then it doesn't give us hope.
It does not help us prepare for the future.

Now you can disagree with me and interpret it a little differently.
I do think if you are too literal in this passage, it will lead to problems, which we will look at more in point number 3.
But I think we can interpret this futuristically.
We can believe it to be literally true.
And we can do that without being too exact about the numbers.

Because this is meant to encourage us about the church.
It is meant to help us today.
When we are worried about the darkness.
When we fear what may be coming.
When we worry about the death and persecution of the church.
We can be reminded that the Lamb is in Zion.
And His people are with Him.
They will endure.
They will be safe.
They may die here on earth.
But they will be with Him, standing tall on Zion.

And we hear something about them.
These people **"had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads."**

Now, this is similar to the mark of the beast.

But it is very different.
It is not a mark or tattoo or engraving.
It is nothing that comes against their will.
God has written His name on their heads.
Just like He has written His name on our hearts.
It is an expression of God's care for them.

The beast marks his people.
And Jesus marks His people.
But those marked by the name of God are blessed.
And they get to stand with the lamb.
They do not just bear the name of Christ as Christians.
They bear His name on themselves.
They are the people of God.

Here is what we need to see.
The people of God can trust the Lamb.
We will stand with the Lamb of God one day.
No matter what comes before you.
We will find out one day what this looks like in the future.

But I know something you can do today.
You can behold the Lamb.
Because Jesus is on the throne.
Jesus is in the Holy Temple right now.
The Son of Man is in Zion.
The Ancient of Days is before the presence of God the Father.
And He is interceding for us.

What can we do today?
We can behold Him.
We can take our eyes off our circumstances.
No matter what you are facing today.
No matter what you will face tomorrow.

No matter what you will face in the days ahead.
You can fix your eyes on Zion.
Look to the victorious lamb.
And you need not fear any dragons.

II. The people of God will sing a new song (v. 2-3).

If you come and visit the Shields house, you will probably hear singing.
Now, Brianna is unquestionably the best singer.
Some of you have seen and heard her on stage.
Or if you stand over there during worship, you can probably hear her.
And her voice is lovely.
But if you come to my house, you will probably hear me sing.
I sing a lot of the time.
I am definitely not as good as Brianna.
And I definitely am not singing the same songs.
In fact, most of the time I sing nonsense.
I sing and narrate what I am doing at the moment.
Or I sing nonsense words.
Or I sing at my children, singing to Quinn baby songs or about life.
Or singing to my boys asking why they are dumping trash on the floor.
Usually, this happens because I am just filled with joy and need to sing.
It just cannot help but come out.

This is some of what happens at the end.
The people of God will sing out and they will sing a new song.
They will not help but be able to sing out.
It is like when the credits of a movie roll and the song starts playing.
The song is playing and it is time to celebrate.
It is time to sing for joy.

Verse 2, **"and I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder."**

There is a voice thundering.
Something that sounds like the roar of the ocean and waters.

It is the sound like a tsunami or a flood.
It is the sound like a great thunderstorm.
The voice is thundering and booming.
This is how the voice of God is always described.
The booms we hear in our most powerful storms are nothing but shadows compared to the sound of God's voice.

"The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps."

The voice is clearly divine.
But it is not just loud and terrifying.
It is not just booming and like a storm or flood.
It is also musical.
It sounds like a beautiful instrument.
There is a harmony and a melody.

It sounds like the sounds of harps.
This is part of where the stereotype of heaven being nothing but angels and harpists comes from.
That and Mark Twain, who wrote a satirical work mocking heaven.
Now, I don't think even the most ardent humorist or atheist would be able to mock when they heard this sound.
And it might not even be the sound of harps.
It is just what it sounded like to John.
Who is trying to describe the voice of God.
Or trying to describe the heavenly voices that he hears.

We get a further description of the voices.
Verse 3, **"and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders."**

They are singing a new song.
It is clear that this is a song of worship.
Because it is before the throne of God.
This is also why I think Zion is describing God's heavenly dwelling.

Because now we are in the throne room of Zion.
And there, the people of God are singing.

There is also some bad news for those of us who just want to sing hymns.
Or we hope heaven will only be the good old classic songs we loved when we were young.

It seems like even in heaven, there will be new songs.
And this is a new song because the lamb is victorious.

There is an element here that is a victory song.
It is like a football team singing the fight song after a game.
Or an army singing around the campfire after a tough battle.
The people of God are singing to worship the victorious God.

"No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth."

This is not a catchy tune that could get stuck in anyone's head.
It is a song only the righteous can sing.
This can be a little tricky to understand.
If you want to be super literal.
Then some take this to mean only exactly this many people learn the song.
And no one else even has the ability to hear it or understand it.

I am not sure that is the right interpretation, though it is valid.
There does seem to be something about this song that makes it hard to sing.
And some of you may or may not be musically inclined.
I am somewhat gifted at music.
I played Saxophone for a long time and can play some piano and bass.
I know some music.
And learning songs can be difficult.
Some songs are simple and you can pick them up quickly.
Some songs take a long time and serious effort to learn.

And there are some songs that take years because you need to be so talented to be able to play or sing them.

I believe this is like that.

This is a song that only people who know the Lamb can sing.

The world and other just do not have the ability.

Or it is like the fight song of a school.

I could learn the words to Boomer Sooner.

There aren't that many.

But there is something that holds me back from being able to sing it.

And it is a deep dislike of the Sooners and a devotion to the Longhorns.

You couldn't pay me enough to sing that song or learn to play it.

I think that is what is happening here.

This song of worship can only be learned by those who love the Lamb.

And one day we will all sing.

We will sing songs of victory.

We will sing songs about the victory of Christ over the dragon.

We will sing about the Lamb who was slain.

We will sing about the victorious church.

We will sing about the God who overcame the greatest darkness.

What a thunder that song will be.

And for now, every song we sing is in anticipation of that day.

III. The people of God will be found blameless (v. 4-5).

The people of God at the end will be blameless.

They will not just be alive and resurrected.

They will be with the Lamb in Zion.

They will get to be in the heavenly places.

They will be able to ascend the mountain where only those with clean hands and pure hearts can climb.

Because you can only be in the throne room God.

You can only be in His presence if you are holy and free from sin.

And that is how the people of God are described.

Verse 4, **"It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins."**

There is a lot in this first description.

And you may notice some problems here.

Or some difficulties in trying to understand what it means.

One option is to take this very literally.

Which would mean that the 144,000, these people of God are virgins.

But they also must be all men.

Because their virginity is described this way.

No women are allowed in this group and it is only men who are chosen and redeemed by God in this way through the tribulation.

So, only men are able to be blessed and sing in this heavenly choir.

I am not sure that is the best way to understand this verse.

And I think the passage is trying to make it clear contextually what it means.

Historically, the church has had problems with passages like this.

The early church really overvalued virginity.

They valued it so much, which it is good and something we should praise.

But they valued it so much that they began to see sex as always being a defilement even in marriage.

Which is part of why priests were always supposed to be celibate.

This can be where the church has historically overvalued virginity and seen sex as a defilement and bad thing, even in the church or in marriage.

Partially from passages like this one.

I don't actually think this is talking about literal virginity.

And I don't think all the 144,000 are men.

Because this is not how the Bible ever talks about women.

The Bible talks a lot about sexual purity.

Sex is only permitted and holy in the context of a marriage between one man and one woman in ways that honor each other and God.

Virginity is not said to be good because women are dirty.

So, it appears to be speaking about a certain kind of sexual purity. It is not saying "good thing these men didn't get married to dirty women." The book of Revelation talks several times about sexual purity. It was mentioned in several of the letters to churches. Because there were false teachers trying to lead them astray into sexual immorality. And in the later chapters we will see more. Chapters 17 and 18 talk about the whore of Babylon. The great prostitute who is the empire of Satan. And how she has committed great sexual immorality. And how she lead the kings of the earth in sexual immorality. And how all the peoples have drank the cup of her sexual sin. Contextually, it seems more like these people have resisted this. The woman mentioned here is the Babylonian prostitute. Which means that the people of God have not fallen for the world's sexual teaching. They do not drink of that cup. They don't just hold to classic Christian sexual ethic. They hold to the bride of Christ and stay true.

Because this is also the main image the prophets use, which John is a prophet. They talk about the people of God as being unfaithful. Sin and idolatry are described in sexual terms as God's people cheating on God and committing adultery. But in Revelation, the church and the people of God are faithful. The bride of Christ is to be a virgin who is faithful to the bride. And the book of Revelation ends in a wedding where the bride is pure. I think this has more to do with that idea. That the people of God will be blameless. They will not give into the world's sexuality. It is worth asking if we are being faithful. If we are following the world's definition of what is right or God's.

"It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he does"

They are blameless because they follow God.

We are the good sheep who hear the voice of the shepherd.

They do not wander off.

They follow His voice.

They go where He leads.

Even if He leads somewhere dangerous.

Even if it is dark and they cannot see.

Even if it doesn't make sense and they think He should have gone another way.

The sheep follow the shepherd.

Do we follow Jesus this way?

"These have been redeemed from mankind as the firstfruits for God and the lamb,"

Israel is often called the first fruits.

These are the first redeemed.

Those first taken by God.

The fruit of the harvest that is coming.

How much do you treasure the first things you harvest from your garden?

How excited are you when the first flowers bloom?

God feels even more strongly about you.

He feels immeasurable joy when He sees you.

And all of heaven rejoices when sinners come to salvation.

When they return to the garden of God.

"And in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless."

They are not people who lie.

This is more than just that they technically do not lie.

It is not just that they do not try to break the letter of the law but are looking for loopholes.

You could search their mouth and all the words that come out of it.

And you will not find any lies and deception.

They are blameless.

Even those who hate them will not be able to accuse them of deception or sin.

This is who the people of God are to be.

This is who they can be.

But we cannot get here on our own.

All of us are not blameless.

We lie and we deceive in large and small ways.

We are pulled and tempted by the world's ideas of sexuality.

We fall far short of the standard of holiness that Jesus sets.

So, how can we be blameless?

Because we acknowledge we cannot actually be blameless.

We always will get things wrong.

We will sin and disobey.

We will make mistakes.

There is only one way to be blameless.

And that is through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is only through the blood of the Lamb.

Jesus Christ died in order to cover and paint over our sins.

To nail them to the cross and to take them far away.

And then He not only takes away our blame.

He make us righteous.

We can be declared blameless, just like these 144,000.

Not because of our own holiness or our own actions.

Not because we have done all of the right things and followed all of the rules.

We can be blameless because of the blood of Jesus.

What we need to see is that this is available to us.

If you do not know Jesus.

If you are not a follower of Christ,

You can be made clean.

All of your sin and all of your guilt can be wiped away.

You can be made new.

This is why Jesus said we need to be born again.

We can have new and eternal life.

You can start not with a clean slate, that you have to try and not mess up again.

You can start again and be blameless because Jesus Christ already took all of the blame.

And when you sin more, He can take that blame too.

He can take and deal with all of our sin and all of our mistakes.

He did more than take away our sins.

He actually imputes His righteousness to our account.

That might be big words.

It means that we can become blameless.

Not because of how awesome we are.

But because Jesus was blameless.

He takes our sin and we get to take His righteousness and holiness.

All we have to do is come to Him in faith.

Repent of our sins, ask for mercy, and follow Jesus.

We come and worship the Lamb of God instead of the beast.

We worship our Creator instead of created things.

This morning we have seen that the people of God look to the Lamb, the will sing a new song, and they will be blameless.

This will not just be true of the 144,000, whoever they are.

This can be true of us this morning.

If we are willing to follow Jesus wherever He goes.

So, church.

Let us follow Jesus, let us sing new songs, and let us be declared blameless by the blood of the lamb.