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Revelation

Chapter 14 - Revealing the Consequence of Choice Declared Blessed from Heaven (vs. 13)

Revelation 14:13: And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

I remember from day one as I was starting to prepare through Chapter 14, it just became so clear to me that this is a chapter about choice. From the 144,000 that are standing on the mount with the Lamb to those that have decided to take the mark of the beast, the contrast is clear and unmistakable. God is telling us that choices need to be made. And in many respects, He's revealing to us what a choice does. I mean, as you look in Chapter 14, choice accentuates, it separates. Choice clarifies, it defines who you are, what you believe. It affects people

around you, it causes you by virtue of your choice to affect them. And by virtue of your choice, it will beckon them either to follow or to make a choice themselves. But once people begin to make choices, it has an effect. And we see that within the passage. There is a sense of when somebody makes a choice and they really believe that it's something true, they beckon others to follow. And it is one of the great signs of choice that you make. If the church is going to be a light, if it's going to be a beacon in a stormy storm, then it has to be clear about what it believes in. It can't be middle of the road. It can't compromise the Word. It can't be tolerant of evil. It can't in any way have union with darkness, as 2 Corinthians 6 tells us. It can't obscure the truth. It has to be clear. It has to be precise. I know that people may feel like they don't need to make a choice. They sit back and go, "Well, you know, maybe if I just don't make a choice..." But to me, what Revelation is revealing is the day is coming when the world is forcing your hand. In fact, the world has been forcing your hand all along. You've been making choices by virtue of the world pushing you into it. It's not God that has forced you into it. Jesus will say, "Come unto Me, all

who will, whosoever believes.” But the world will say, “You must believe the way that we believe.” And there is a culmination coming to the end days in which the forcing is going to be so impossible to ignore that the decision will have to be made. The world is forcing your hand. It's forcing you to do things their way. It's forcing you to think things their way. It's telling you in their education, “You have to think the way we think.”

Colossians 2:8 says that there are the philosophies and the empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the plans of the world. They have a way of thinking, and they want you to think the same way that they think. They're forcing you to fear the same things that they're afraid of.

We read in Jeremiah 10:2, don't listen to the world. They're telling you to be afraid of certain things. Don't be afraid of the same things they're telling you.

And in Jeremiah 10:3, you're actually reading about the fact that they're trying to tell you what to worship, the things that you should worship. Well, you might say, “If I don't, what will happen?” Well, the day is coming, if you

don't do what they tell you to do, if you don't do things their way, if you don't think the way they think, if you don't fear things they fear, and if you don't worship what they want you to worship, then you're not going to buy any gas or electricity. The day is coming when you're not going to be able to go to restaurants or stores, groceries, or buy medicine. You're not going to have a job. You're not going to be able to get health care which is such a horrible thing. You're not going to have credit. You won't have access to your bank account. You won't be able to travel or even communicate with anybody.

The passage says in Revelation 13:17,

(Revelation 13:17) “And he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.”

You won't be able to do anything. That's called forcing your hand if you don't recognize it. You'll be isolated by society.

And according to Matthew 24, there's an interesting picture, if you'll look with me, in verse 9, Jesus warns,

(Matthew 24:9) “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations...”

Not some. All nations. There's no place that you're going to go.

“... because of My name.”

Matthew 24:10) At that time many will fall away and will betray one another...”

You know what that's talking about, don't you? One another? Family. That's why it's saying, “one another”. It's not betrayal unless it's somebody that you love. They're going to betray you and they're going to hate you. What is the passage saying? You're going to be forced to make a decision. And when you make the decision, it's going to be a powerful result in so doing.

That's why Revelation 13:15 says,

(Revelation 13:15) “And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”

You're going to die. You say, "I'm not going to make a choice." You'll make a choice. Because if you don't choose what they want you to choose, they will kill you for doing it.

Down through the ages, the world has demanded allegiance. I mean, you go all the way back to Nimrod in the Tower of Babel. He demanded allegiance and created slavery at that particular time. You fast forward all the way to the time of Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar tells people, "Unless you bow down to my statue, I'm going to throw you into the furnace." Hitler says, "We're going to do social reforms, and if you don't follow the social reforms, we'll kill you." It's all under the guise of sometimes crusades, sometimes social reforms, sometimes it's under the guise of just progress. But the world is declaring, "You need to fit into our mode; you need to do things the way we tell you to do them. You need to think the way we tell you to think, and if you don't, you're dead!"

The clarity of this within the passage that we're going to be looking at specifically today in Revelation 14 is telling

us that the choice is unavoidable. And all along He's been telling you, "You're either on this side or you're on that side." It's a thing that the church of Smyrna has had to wrestle with.

If you go all the way back to Revelation 2, and you look specifically with me at this wonderful church, the church of Smyrna, in many respects they're going through that moment of decision.

It says this in verse 8,

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life..."

Why is He describing Himself in this way to the church of Smyrna? Because they're going to get ready to die.

They're about to die. They're 10 days away from dying.

It's like somebody walked up to you and said, "You're going to be dead in 10 days."

(Revelation 2:9) 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.'

(Revelation 2:10) 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer...'

"You're going to die. Don't be afraid." Every time I read this verse, I can't help but think of the time I was working at the brake shop and I got a piece of metal stuck in my eye. I had to go to an eye doctor. The doctor puts my head in a vice, and he gets out a drill. And I never will forget it. He goes, "Don't blink." And I'm going...

He says, "You're about to die. Do not fear. Don't be afraid." How can you not?

"... Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

(Revelation 2:11) 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'

God is calling upon us to make choices. Be faithful until death.

It's the same thing that is being read in Matthew 10, as Jesus is preparing His disciples to go out and proclaim the wonderful message. But it's clear as He says in Matthew 10, "It's not going to be easy. You're going to have difficulty. You're going to have problems. I'm going to send you out and you're going to minister, and you're going to help people that are broken, people that are in need. You're going to give them good news. But let Me tell you this, what's going to happen. You're going to have difficult times."

And so, he says this in verse 16,

(Matthew 10:16) "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

(Matthew 10:17) But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;

(Matthew 10:18) and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles."

Not if they deliver you up,

(Matthew 10:19) “But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.”

(Matthew 10:20) For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”

And I'm just letting you know ahead of time,

(Matthew 10:21) “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.”

That's such an intense passage to me.

(Matthew 10:22) “You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.”

That's a choice. That's a powerful choice. Be faithful to the end. Take it all the way.

In many respects, Jesus covers the same point in John. If you'll look with me in John 14, as you come to the end of this particular chapter, He warns them of the fact that He has certainly been hated; they are going to be hated as

well. But a helper is going to be sent to them. And He's going to give them peace in the midst of it.

By the time you come to Chapter 15, in verse 17, it reads this way,

(John 15:17) “This I command you, that you love one another.

(John 15:18) If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

(John 15:19) If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

(John 15:20) Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...”

(John 16:1) “These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling.”

You know, you start going through suffering and you watch loved ones die for their faith. You begin to wonder, “Did I do the right thing?”

(John 16:2) “They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.

(John 16:3) These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me.”

Satan is a murderer. He's a thief. He kills and he steals. How do we know that what they're doing is not of God? Because God's not a murderer. He doesn't murder people. But the day is coming when they're going to do this. You're going to be scratching your head going, “Why is this going on?” He says, “Remember what I told you. Because that's going to keep you from stumbling.” In the midst of it, you're going to say, “It shouldn't be working out this way,” and then you'll remember these words; but He said that's exactly how it's going to work out. And there's going to be a strengthening because of that. There's a realization that they're going to hate me because I do love Him. I must be right on target.

This one verse in Revelation 14:13, I just really felt constrained to just see it as it is in my particular Bible, a paragraph unto itself. It is a declaration that you've made

a choice, I've made a choice, and because of that, we've been pronounced, we've been ordained, we've been declared forever blessed by God. I love the way that it's conveyed because it starts off with a sense of ambiguity, who exactly is saying this? And I believe the reason for that is that it's wanting to convey that all of heaven is in union with God declaring this; that the heavens are like with one soul that is saved, I tell you there is more rejoicing in all the heavens, as Scripture will say. Well, it could have said there is more rejoicing with God in His throne. It doesn't want you just to see that as the only point; that God is rejoicing and all of heaven is rejoicing because of this. The declaration is coming from the heavens. And it's saying, "We declare you blessed and forever it's recorded so." We know that when God declares something, and says, "Write this down," that not one jot or not one tittle is ever, ever not fulfilled.

So, the passage begins this way,

(Revelation 14:13) "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" ..."

What a great passage this is. “Blessed are the dead.” These are the people that have made a choice. They would rather die than compromise. They would rather die than worship the beast.

Job will say in Job 13:15,

(Job 13:15) “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him...”

“And I know that my Redeemer lives and at last I believe He's going to take His stand on the earth. I believe this.” And Job was able to see something that went far beyond that moment. He was able to make a choice to believe in God in the midst of his greatest sorrow.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego say this in Daniel 3:17-18,

(Daniel 3:17) “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

(Daniel 3:18) But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods...”

They made a choice. They didn't know how it was going to turn out. But I can tell you this; the heavens declared

them blessed. And it not only has that wonderful connotation of the fact that God's blessings are upon you, but that God's blessings are within you and there is a happiness and a joy and a contentment that is never going to leave you. Literally, the face of God has shined upon you, and the blessings of God will never abandon you. You are His.

And as Paul will say so aptly in 2 Timothy 4, "I know that the Lord will bring me safely home. I just know that. The time of my departure has come. Nero's about to chop off my head. But I know He's going to bring me safely home." Paul, you're making a really bad choice here. "No, I'm making the best choice that I could ever make. I would rather have the blessing of God upon me."

In Acts 4:19-20, Peter and John are threatened with their life and they said, "We must obey God. We cannot put men's wish over God's wish. We have to proclaim His word. We cannot be quiet."

The decision was made that was so clear by Stephen in Acts 7:59. Stephen, in the midst of being stoned to death, as he stands in the midst of the council, begins to declare,

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And then he says something that was almost impossible to believe would be coming out of his mouth, “Don't hold this against them.” He made a choice to believe that what was happening to him was of the greatest benefit, and that those that were stoning him were the souls that were hurting. And they were the ones that were given the short end of the stick. His concern was for them. He was not being deprived of anything. No, no. The blessings of God were upon him. And as he looks up, he sees Christ standing at the right hand of the Father, welcoming Him. Now, that's blessing. He saw something clearly different than anyone else. And it is that which we believe.

The world is pushing us into choices. And I have found that the world has things tremendously upside down. It almost seems as if the world has made it their number one goal to avoid death. And let me just say this about that; avoiding death is not something worth living for. That is not the goal of our lives. It has never been the goal of our lives. You go all the way back in the Old Testament, and Methuselah who lived 969 years; that's quite a long

time. If we were to summarize his life, which Scripture does, it reads this way, if I could just quote it to you, from Genesis 5, “Methuselah lived 969 years and he died.” Impressive. 969 years, and all Scripture can say is he died. That's it. Do you know who his father was? His father was Enoch, who walked with God. And he lived 365 years and he was taken up. Scripture tells us that he was a righteous man and Jude records him as one who proclaimed and warned people of the judgment to come.

A fraction of the time, Abraham will live 175 years, not close to 969. But how many wonderful things are written of Abraham? Stephen and James will die in their mid-30s. But the work that was done, Jesus will be 33 when He dies. The impact of these men, the impact of our Savior, had nothing to do with the longevity of the lifespan. It had everything to do with how they lived their life and what they lived their life for. One of the scary things about the mentality of people today is the perception that “I need to focus on making my life longer.” And by virtue of this, what begins to be compromised are things like, well, lifestyle. Specifically, you begin to compromise your

morals, you begin to compromise your integrity, you begin to compromise honor, you begin to live a life of no value because the only thing you can think about is the longevity of your life. You're not living for anybody else, you're living only for yourself. And after a while, your thoughts of self-preservation literally consume you. You will live in fear, you will live only for yourself, but worst of all, you will live without love. Because love only thinks of others. It can't think of itself. And a person that's only thinking about preserving their life is never concerned nor desirous of risking their life to save others. Scripture describes our Lord and Savior, "Greater love has no man than this than one lay down his life." Well, that's not someone trying to preserve their life. That's somebody saying, "Whether by life or by death, we will give glory to God." And it's a perception that my life is more than just number. We're here for a reason, and that is to display to God, "We are going to be loyal and loving to You no matter what." It's hard for me to believe, but the greatest work that I could ever do is to be loyal and loving to my Father. That's the greatest thing that I could ever do on this earth; to not deny Him, to maintain my love for Him,

to do everything that I do for Him is what God is looking for. And though it may seem maybe small or minuscule in the eyes of men, it matters not to God. What God is looking for is that heart that says, "I'm not going to leave You." Just like He said that to us, "I'll never leave you. I'm not going to forsake you." He's looking for the same thing from us.

The passage in Revelation 14 reads, "I heard the voice from the heavens. They said, 'Write this down: These are the ones who are blessed, who will die. They will not take the mark of the beast because it's been very clear that there are those that are going to take the mark because they're afraid that they're not going to live longer.'" That's their one fear, "Oh, that I'm not going to live longer."

Watch how this verse ends,

(Revelation 14:13) "... "Yes," says the Spirit..."

Why does that add that in? You know, I believe that when you and I make this decision and we make this resolve, "I'm not going to live to live longer. I'm going to live to please God." When you make that decision, the Spirit of God within us says, "Yes, you are blessed." You want to

know why people are so miserable? Because they're living their life to live longer. What a worthless hole that is.

What a void that is. I mean, really, that's the reason why you exist, to live longer? There has been somebody that's already done that, been far more successful than you'll ever be; it didn't work for him either. God is calling upon us to make that decision, and I have found when I make that decision, the blessing of God is upon me. And if you've ever read the Fox's Book of Martyrs and you begin to read of all these people that have willingly stepped into the fire, whether it's Ignatius or Ireneus and Polycarp, as he's being thrown into the lion's den, and he cries out, "I long to hear my bones being crushed for the sake of God." That people who have been thrown in the fire and they can hear them singing hymns. These are the blessed but are the blessed forevermore.

For not only does the Spirit affirm, but as the passage goes on to say,

“... “so that they may rest from their labors...””

Their toils, their hardships, their pains, their suffering. You see, we're going, from the blessings of God upon us to the

blessings of God surrounding us, we're going to heaven. And what a wonderful day that will be because our deeds, as the passage reads, are following us. What deed is He talking about? Your love and loyalty and devotion to God. That's what He's talking about. That's what's going to follow you. Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Matthew 5, you're familiar with the text, but it's Beatitudes. So, it's only appropriate that we read what makes us happy, what are the blessings, and what makes us blessed.

(Matthew 5:3) “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matthew 5:4) Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

(Matthew 5:5) Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

(Matthew 5:6) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

(Matthew 5:7) Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

(Matthew 5:8) Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

(Matthew 5:9) Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

Write this down:

(Matthew 5:10) “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:11) Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

(Matthew 5:12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great...”

The passage doesn't read, “Blessed are those that have done all kinds of miraculous Christian works, and people have seen the things that they've done. Oh, they've traveled here, and they've traveled there. They've ministered to these people, and they ministered to

them.” It doesn't say that. It says, “Blessed are you because you loved Me, they reviled you.” You see, Scripture, the Bible, has always been about your relationship with God. The deeds that are following you are not the grand, glorious works that you have done and accomplished. I mean, the love of Christ constrains me to serve Him. But it's not the great deeds that I have done. God's doing the work. But what God does reward is the heart that says, “I'm not leaving. And I'm not denying You. And I'm going to follow You and I'm going to proclaim unashamedly my love for You. And when the question comes and the doubts arise, I'm going to stand up for Jesus.” And there is a sense of integrity that has to be Spirit induced. And God goes, “Write that guy down, blessed forevermore.”

You're the salt of the earth. You and I are preservatives of a love for God. And we need to be clear about this. Oh, the world's going to force you into making a decision eventually. In fact, in many ways, they're forcing you every day to make decisions. Are you going to put your trust in the Lord? Are you going to put your trust in your

bank account? Are you going to put your trust in your circumstances? I mean, they're already forcing you. The day is going to come when it's going to be so clear. What Revelation is going to ultimately say at the end of the book is, what you have been doing, you will continue to do. So, if you've been making those choices, you first, if you've been making that choice, you won't have any problem at the end. If you've been putting other things in front of God, you'll cave and you'll follow the evil one. God is calling upon us to make a choice, and my choice is not to live long. My choice is to obey God and to do what He tells me to do. And sometimes that's going to put you in harm's way; sometimes that's going to put you in precarious places. So what? You say, "You may die." So what? I would rather die serving the Lord than live denying Him.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today and we ask You to stir within our hearts choice, decision. We've decided to follow You. We're not leaving. Our love and devotion is to

You, not to anything else. We know the world's going to threaten us and we know the day is coming when they're going to carry out their desire to kill this old flesh. It will not matter to us. In fact, as Philippians says, our very confidence is going to become a conviction to them. You tell us the day is coming when we're going to be delivered up. You tell us, "Don't be afraid." Father, if we're afraid of dying, we're going to be afraid in that day. If we can let that go, there will be no fear.

Heads bowed and your eyes closed. God's wanting to give you peace so that you will have no concern of the second death. It is appointed unto man to die. But you don't have to do it twice. And God has so declared that those that will die for Him will be forever blessed. I can't think of a better way to go. Decide that you're just going to do what God tells you to do, and you're going to stop making decisions based on whether or not it's going to hurt you or not. Decide to follow Him, to please Him. Learn what is pleasing to Him. And stop living your life in fear.