

Title: “Sing a New Song” April 15, 2018 Pastor Dave Sattler

Series: The Book of Revelation Texts: Revelation 14:1-5; 15:2-4

Sources: NIV Life Application Bible. Commentaries: Gordon Fee, Darrell Johnson, & Robert Mounce. Book: “Reversed Thunder” by Eugene Peterson. Sermon: Mark Peters, NSAC, 4/8/2018. Wikipedia: Domitian, Friedrich Neitzche. Websites: macleans.ca, philosophy.stackexchange.com.

I. Review & Introduction:

- **<Slide>** Good morning, everyone. I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC today continuing our Series on the Book of Revelation.
- Difficult to comprehend, and, over the centuries, often misinterpreted, Revelation is apocalyptic writing. Long before television, internet, and mass media, this form of Jewish literature used symbolic imagery; often to communicate a message of hope amidst hardship.
- Revelation centres around a series of colourful visions God gives to the Apostle John, an exiled old pastor. [That probably explains a lot!] John is stationed on Patmos, an island off the west coast of present day Turkey.
- Revelation is set against the backdrop of the age-old battle between God and Satan, who, unwilling to concede, is constantly fighting, trying to destroy the people of God. – MP, 4/8/2018
- **<Slide>** I’d like to put it out there now for some audience participation,
 - With a Question: “How do you deal with a bully?”
 - Please text your answers to 604-809-1457.
- **<Slide>** John’s audience? All believers. His visions still preach today.
- But specifically, Revelation was meant for followers of Christ in seven churches in Asia, who, in the late 1st Century, faced persecution under Domitian, the Roman Emperor (81-96 AD).
- Domitian was an authoritarian, a despot. And Christians of his time period were subject to a barrage ... of Roman coercions, sanctions, and violence, intended to snuff them out. And their faith with them.
- ILL - Years ago, one of my kids became old enough to play Select Soccer.
 - I had coached their team for five seasons when it came time to apply to coach one of the Select Teams. **<Slide>**
 - Now, this was a volunteer position, but it was serious business.
 - So I assembled my soccer resume: 15+ years of coaching, tons of experience with youth, passion for the game of soccer, etc.
 - Next came the interview with Club Board Members.
 - Early on, it was clear I was not the person they were looking for.
 - Casting doubt on my character and suitability, for the next 30 minutes, they did most of the talking. And, the mocking.
 - Of me ... as a person, as a Christian, and a pastor.
 - Q: ‘Bet you won’t be drinking with us at the Club Christmas Party!’

- o ‘All you care about is converting people, how can you know anything about soccer?!’ ‘You live in a Christian bubble, you can’t relate to players!’ And, the kicker, ‘We all know the terrible things priests have done, how can we trust you with kids?’
 - o Needless to say, I didn’t get the job.
 - o And, I spent the next 2 soccer seasons basically ‘shagging balls in the bush’ as assistant to a tyrant Head Coach.
 - o You know, this story actually has a happy ending, but you’ll have to wait till the end of the sermon to hear it!
- <Slide> Let’s pick up God’s revelation to John in Chapter 14:1-5 and 15:2-4, p.999-1000 in the blue Bibles in the seat rack in front of you. Or, you can turn there now on your electronic device.
 - Revelation 13 has left us with an “unholy trinity” of creatures: two beasts and a dragon; and a world diametrically opposed to the Christian Story.
 - Now, the grim visions of Chapter 13 give way to glimpses of “future victory” meant to embolden the people of God in the face of tyrants who threaten their livelihoods. Today’s texts are scenes in which, Darrell Johnson says,
 - o Q: readers are given a picture of “what a disciple of Jesus [really] looks like [in the thick of it].” – p.267. Now, and in the future.

Revelation 14:1-5, The Lamb and the 144,000

14 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. 2 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. 3 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. 4 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. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

Revelation 15:2-4, Saints Beside the Glassy Sea

2 And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb: “Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. 4 Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

- <PRAY> ‘Lord, move me out of the way. Come now and speak to us by your Spirit. In the face of all the pressures this world throws our way. We’re hungry to hear from you.’

II. Text Outline:

1. <Slide> **The Lamb Standing With 144,000 (14:1)**

- “... and there before me was the Lamb,” John writes. Really?! Is that how Jesus will appear?! As a cute, cuddly, innocuous, little sheep?
- Doubt it! Likely Jesus will return one day as a resurrected, glorified human.
- But, we should also recognize ... something in His demeanour, tips in His appearance that makes us think ... ‘Lamb’, not just ‘Lion.’
- And, what’s He doing? “Standing on Mount Zion.”
- This posture is significant. Paul exhorts Ephesian Christians to,
 - Q: “... put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” – Cf. Ephesians 6:13
- Standing must have felt impossible in the wake of all ancient Rome was throwing their way. That many would fall to martyrdom was inevitable. Still, beyond the grave, those who remained true to the Lamb would indeed stand.
- The identity of this “144,000” has been cause for serious debate. [I know you all came to church today to hear Sattler set it straight once and for all!]
- Some scholars suggest this number represents all the martyrs who’ve endured the great tribulation and come out the other side.
- Others say, these are “super-saints” who are a little more perfect than the rest.
- Some theologians are of the opinion the “144,000” is purely symbolic. Twelve, a significant number – tribes of Israel, disciples of Jesus – times twelve; times ten – lots; times ten again – lots and lots; times ten again – more than anyone can count!
- Regardless, the picture here is of the new people of God. Made up of Jews and Gentiles from every tribe, language, and nation.
- All there with Jesus, their King.

2. <Slide> **A New Song (14:2-3)**

- And, they are singing “a new song” (3). The music begins with an attention-grabbing prelude ... of “rushing waters” and pealing “thunder” and “harpists” playing in unison accompanied by God’s ultimate choir.
- They are worshipping the Lamb. Eugene Peterson says, Q: “Nothing that we do has more effect in heaven or on earth [than our worship].” – p.142

- In the Book of Revelation, worship is a means by which evil is defeated. It's also a way of celebrating victory over that evil. And, it's how the people of God get re-oriented. Like a 'compass,' worship always guides them back.
- Truth is: No matter the trouble they find themselves in, there will always be a special place for God's people, with Him, and a special "new song" for them to sing — a redemption song, that credits their salvation to their Lord Jesus Christ. And Him alone.

3. <Slide> People Who Follow the Lamb (14:4-5)

- Much has been made of v.4. Are those who follow the Lamb supposed to remain "virgins?" This has spawned all sorts of spiritual practices.
- "No lie was found in their mouths." Are they deemed, "blameless" (5) by their own efforts? Apart from Jesus, could this be said of any human?
- Of course not!
- The way of a Christ-follower is here likened to fidelity in a marriage.
- Here's the point: Just as in ancient times, soldiers were to abstain from sex during war-time to focus on the battle, God's people mustn't divide their loyalties by falling for other gods.
- APP - Sexual sin and lies run rampant in our culture.
 - As Christians, we've been "purchased" by the shed blood of Jesus.
 - We belong to Him and are "offered" up to God — even betrothed to Him as the "bride of Christ."
 - So we are to 'march to a different drummer.'
- Those "who follow the Lamb" (4) are urged, not to succumb, not even to blend in, but to walk in an entirely different way. Certainly not easy.

4. <Slide> Saints Beside the Glassy Sea (15:2)

- John describes the next scene in Chapter 15, Q: saints again "standing," this time "beside" a "sea of glass." Another vision rich with symbolism.
- The water is crystally calm. God has tamed the 'chaos' lurking in earth's vast and mighty oceans; it's glassy now, but also "glowing with fire," anticipating judgement — showing God does not let sin or injustice go unpunished.
- The persecutor, the oppressor, the bully will one day have to pay.
- <Slide> Which brings us back to today's Text Question. Let's read some of your responses to "How do you deal with a bully?" <READ Answers>
- <Slide> ILL - Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th Century German philosopher,
 - Once issued a warning that's worth a look, Q: "Do not become a monster in order to defeat a monster." — philosophy.stackexchange.com
 - It's easy to 'lose our heads' and our values in the face of cruel opposition. To fight fire with fire. Rage with rage.

- It's why I have such respect for the work of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr and his path of non-violent resistance. It's the way of Christ.
- **<Slide>** One scholar says, Q: "The victory comes in facing the worst the beast can throw at us and [still] remaining faithful." — Johnson, p.275
- Leaving justice in God's hands, in a sweet twist of irony, those originally conquered by the beast are now in heaven "victorious" over the beast.
- Yes, most would have died a cruel death, but they did not succumb to Roman bullying. "Over the beast," the saints have been "victorious."

5. **<Slide> The Song of Moses & of the Lamb (15:3-4)**

- And they're worshiping again. They "sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb" (2b-3). It's a 'throw-back' song, a 'golden-oldie,' the Exodus tune about God's deliverance out of Egypt.
- Every phrase comes from the rich vocabulary of the Old Testament.
- And I love its focus. This ought to be the content of our worship.
- APP - Not for our entertainment, not about us, worship is ...
 - For God, about God. No "I's" or "Me's," but "You" and "Your," in reference to God, appear no less than seven times. His names, "Lord God Almighty" and "King of the Nations" are sung aloud.
 - Worship songs are meant to help God's people recall their story.
 - They 'lock in our memories the truths of God's mighty acts, past and present: He has won our salvation, surprisingly, against all odds, not with superior force but ... by a Lamb, through a cross.
 - Oh, how we need constant reminders of this awesome story!

III. **Application:**

- Time to 'land the plane' on the sermon with a few application points.
- They come this morning in a series of questions.
- 1. **<Slide> What do you see? Through which lenses are you looking?**
 - The question is not, 'Do you see the world through a set of glasses?' But rather, "What do you see?" "Through which lenses are you looking?"
 - For, how we see the world is influenced by decisions we make, shaped by our culture, and coloured by the people we listen to.
 - A primary purpose of the Book of Revelation's plethora of vivid imagery is to counter-balance the sheer power of the Roman Empire's 'propaganda-machine' that sought to purge the Christian imagination and worldview.
 - APP - We too are bombarded with pictures ... eye-catching ones ...
 - Day after day, messaging us ... on how we're supposed to look, what we're supposed to do, feel, think — what life should be like, if we're

really living it! And it's near impossible to see anything else — let alone Jesus ... and His character, values, & plans.

- o Culture all too willingly hands us the 'glasses' ... so naturally, it's hard to even realize what's happening to us; let alone say, 'No!'
 - o Superfluous, little of what the world chides us to 'see' has depth to it or can provide adequate strength when the 'big one' hits.
- ILL - Last Sunday the community of Humboldt, Saskatchewan ...
 - o Held a vigil for those injured and killed in the bus crash, which claimed the lives of 16 people. Prime Minister Trudeau was there. Don Cherry and Ron Maclean were there. But they didn't speak.
 - o <Slide> Broncos' Hockey Team Chaplain, Pastor Sean Brandow did. On live national television, amidst his own grief and tears, here's some of what he said ...
 - o Q: "Where. Where was God? That question has two answers. **God is on the throne and God is with the brokenhearted.** We know that God is on the throne, Jesus walked this earth, He died, He was buried, He rose again. It says in the scripture that He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, in control ... I don't claim to understand how this seems like it's in God's control at all, but it is. He's still on the throne, He's still God. As you look at God on the throne, it's easy to look at God from a distance but ... God is [right here] with us." — macleans.ca
 - <Slide> Worlds away, it's hard to grasp the nuance. But, in the Jewish mindset, this vision of the Lamb with His people "standing" and worshipping on "Mount Zion" would have been 'code' for: 'God is still on the throne.'
 - And, with this image, a clarion call went forth: no matter the opposition, no matter the tragedy, no matter the pain, Q: Our "God is still on the throne and [our] God walks with the broken-hearted."
 - APP - In the darkness of our present circumstance ...
 - o Can we ... will we see God?
 - o We're encouraged to grab the 'lenses' Jesus offers — ones that see through His cross and out the other side! This is our greatest hope!
- 2. <Slide> What carries you? Who or what do you worship?**
- The question isn't, 'Do you worship?' For, consciously or not, we all worship ... things we bow to, orient our lives around, give our time to.
 - The truth of our loyalties always comes out in the end.
 - Seems imperative we get what, or who we're worshipping, right.
 - Central in these two scenes in Revelation 14 & 15 is God's gathered together to "sing a new song." Worship is core to what it means to be the people of God.

- Hear Psalm 40, Q: “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. **He put a new song in my mouth**, a hymn of praise to our God.” — Psalm 40:1-3a
- ILL - Now I love to jump in on God’s mission.
 - Much to be done out there in our world, I’m a ‘man on a mission!’
 - But, busy-ness, life’s distractions, even our noble activism can get the best of us. And worship here can seem like a waste of time. [I know some of you come late to church to skip some of the songs!]
 - But, like it or not, music is a powerful thing.
 - I am one that loves music, even though I’m not a singer — notes, keys, pitches, I don’t have an ear for any of that. But, I can add volume; it’s why I love to worship from over there — closest to the loudest instruments, no one in front of me — except Pastor Paul [poor guy!] And I can belt it out!
 - I have loved singing to Jesus. Right here. With you. And, on those Wednesday nights for 11 years with my youth kids. And now, for the past 10, on Wednesday afternoons with my Coffee Time friends.
- APP - Ever wonder why worshiping Jesus with other people has such a powerful sensation attached to it?
 - Worship is what we’ve been created for — made to do.
 - Worship carries us. Re-focuses us, away from ourselves, and onto the One Who really matters: Jesus, the Lion & the Lamb.
 - When, in trouble, what do we do? Worship. Lost and feeling alone? Worship. Sad and hurting? Worship. Celebrating? Worship.
 - Often, in worship, I am so deeply moved in my spirit and touched by the presence of Jesus.
 - And, these times are just a foretaste of eternity.
 - Like one commentator puts it, Q: “there remains the joyful prospect of soon standing beyond this sphere of suffering ... and singing with the innumerable multitude of the redeemed the new song of salvation.” — Mounce, p.269

3. <Slide> **Who do you follow? Do you sport the marks of Jesus?**

- The question is not, ‘Will you be a disciple?’ But, ‘Whose disciple are you?’ “Who do you follow?” For, we all follow someone.
- Revelation 14:4 describes the people of God, Q: “They **follow the Lamb** wherever He goes.” “Do you sport the marks of Jesus?”
- APP - On one hand, facing persecution is a reality foreign to us.
 - Not much challenges our self-reliance or self-sufficiency.

- o Here, in the west, it's still reasonably comfortable to practice Christianity. Faith is mostly private, conveniently buried somewhere in a 'compartment' of our life.
- o For the most part we are able to blend in; we're not often pressed to choose between our Christian convictions ... and the law, or, our very survival. At least for the time being.
- APP - Yet, on the other hand, it is hard to follow Jesus today.
 - o When friends, family members, neighbours, classmates, teachers, work colleagues ... speak to us condescendingly, it hurts.
 - o One can walk away from these interactions being made to feel stupid, naive, narrow-minded, even prudish for following Jesus.
 - o A lonely walk ... sometimes you might just feel like giving up.
- ILL - Which takes us back to my story ...
 - o So, there I am, shagging balls in the bush for a tyrant Head Coach of my kid's Select Team ... for a second cold, wet, winter soccer season.
 - o Parents are now taking their kids and leaving for other clubs because 2 of the 3 coaches selected were brutal.
 - o And the Club comes calling.
 - o Sheepishly asking me now to coach a team.
 - o Truthfully, I wanted to stick it in their face, but I kindly said, 'yes.'
 - o And this began a **sweet** journey. <Slide>
 - o So many deep people-connections.
 - o Tons of opportunities to lift up Jesus.
 - o In 2009, North Shore hosted Provincials. And our team won it!
 - o And, that day, up at Inter-River, some of the very same people who drilled me in that interview six years earlier, presented us the Cup!
 - o One of my coaching dreams also came true: I got a Gatorade shower from players and parents in the post-game celebration! What a joy!
- <Slide> Long-awaited, out of our control, much sacrificed, unexpected victory. This is the picture Revelation paints. Those originally conquered by the beast are now, in eternity, victorious over that beast! Because of Jesus' life, death, & resurrection. And their faith in Him.
- **Sing a new song!**
- Let us carry this hope-filled image with us as we live our lives in this day.
- Keep on following Jesus! Amen.