

Revelation 14:1-5
Those Who Follow
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One of my favorite children's books is *Saint George and the Dragon*. I like the one retold by Margaret Hodges and illustrated by Trina Hyman. I used to go to the library as a kid and look at all the pictures in this book. In fact, I loved the pictures so much I never actually read the words. So two weeks ago I went to the library, got the book, and read it.

The story is about a "Red Cross Knight" who follows the princess "Una." Her land is terrorized by a "dreadful dragon" and only a champion can save them. But this dragon breathes fire and is the size of a hill. The knight and dragon clash in a horrible fight that lasts several days. Twice the "brassy scaled dragon" almost kills the knight. But twice he returns cleaving the dragon's wing, tale, and paw. Finally on the third day the knight slays the dragon with his sword. The king and queen come out from their fortress rejoicing. The news that the "great beast has fallen" goes out. And a message of "peace and joy" travels throughout the entire realm. The good "Red Cross Knight" has slain the evil dragon.

We're reading a similar story through the book of Revelation. In Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we've read about a dragon and a Lamb. The whole story of Revelation and the Bible itself is about the victory of the Lamb. Revelation tells us our "Red Cross Knight" is the Lamb—Jesus Christ. Jesus is our champion who has come to deliver us from the evil dragon—Satan himself. We're finding out that all who follow this champion also wage war against the dragon. We wage war against the dragon and the worldview and message that follows him.

For some of you I bet hearing about this war has been an encouragement. Every week you love hearing about the unstoppable victory of Christ. You love hearing how the dragon is already slain although it's still thrashing. But for others maybe it's been difficult to hear about persecution and hardship. You feel discouraged about what will take place before Christ returns. I'm guessing most of you feel a little bit of both. I hope that today's message will fill your sails with encouragement. Because today we're focusing on our victory over the dragon. We're getting caught up in the story of what it means to follow Jesus. Those who follow Jesus in defeat already stand with him in victory. This is the big idea of our text, Revelation 14:1-5.

We follow Jesus into battle because we belong to Jesus. And if you belong to Jesus, you don't have to be afraid. No one or no thing, not even the dragon, can take you away from Christ.

Those who belong to Jesus now will belong to him forever (14:1)

Those who belong to Jesus today will belong to him always. (14:1) Verse one opens with a picture of 144K standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb. They have the name of the Father and of Jesus Christ written on their foreheads. We last read about the 144K in Revelation chapter 7. The 144K are all the servants of God who are sealed by God—they're us. In other words, 144K is a symbolic number for the complete number of saints. This is not a literal 144K, like the Jehovah Witnesses believe, but a representative number. We know it's symbolic because the same verse talks about a Lamb and names on foreheads. The names on the forehead

isn't a literal stamp, but that believers belong to Christ. So if the text isn't talking about a sheep, but Jesus, then the 144K is also representative.

What's much more significant is why the 144K show up twice in Revelation. In chapter 7 the 144K are on the earth and in chapter 14 they are standing on Mount Zion. Mount Zion is the New Jerusalem—the heavenly city of God where God himself dwells. In chapter 14 we get a picture of God fulfilling what he promised in chapter 7. This means that when God promises to rescue his people, he's good on his word. We believe in a God who promises to rescue us, and he will. He will deliver his people from the dragon and we will dwell with him in safety. God will rescue those who belong to him—who are marked by the name of Jesus. Those who belong to Jesus now will belong to him forever.

This picture of the 144K standing on Mount Zion is not just for the end of time. (14:1) It's a picture of the "already-and-not-yet" or the "now-and-not-yet." I know some of you tech-savvy materialistic types own iPhones. The newer iPhones have the option of taking "HDR" photographs. When you turn on this setting, you don't take just one photo, but three photos. Your camera takes a picture of the foreground, middleground, and background. But you only see one picture when you swipe through your album. Your camera takes the best pieces of the three pictures and merges them into one. Scripture is doing something similar in Revelation 14:1-5. It's merging a picture of the present with a picture of the future. It's like God has a camera that takes a picture of the now and the end. Notice that in this picture we are standing in victory with Christ already.

Both the words "stand" and "written" are in what grammarians call the perfect tense. The perfect is when something happens in the past that has continuing consequences. What did Jesus do in the past that has continuing consequences for us today? The Lamb "standing" refers to Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. Revelation 5:6 says, "And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it has been slain..." You can stand with Christ on Mount Zion today because Christ died on a hill yesterday. Christ saved you and his name and his Father's name are now written on your forehead. Nobody can take you from his hands or off Mount Zion. Later in Revelation 17:9 we're going to read about seven hills. The ancient city of Rome was built on seven hills. The Christians in Rome are the original people John wrote this letter too. So I think he's also pointing out that Christ's hill is much higher than Rome's mountains. When you stand with Jesus, you only need one mountain and you are secure. Those who belong to Jesus now will belong to him forever.

But maybe you've noticed the "now" is a little more difficult than we'd like. You long for a perfect future but struggle with a marred present—war, divorce, a job you dislike.

Those who worship Jesus in trial will worship him in peace. (14:2-3)

Those who worship Jesus in trial will worship him in peace. (14:2-3) The picture John gives us in verses 2-3 is of a great multitude of believers. Back in Revelation 7:9 we read about 144K followed by a great multitude. This great multitude stands before the throne praising the Lamb. Notice the same order appears in Revelation 14. First John *sees* 144K and then he *hears* "a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters." The word "thunder" tells us this great multitude is also standing before the throne. Whenever we read the word "thunder" in Revelation it has to do with God and judgment. John is describing the one people of God from two different angles—sight and sound. First John sees the great multitude—the symbolic 144K—and then he hears them. The multitude are the saints from the past, present, and future—they are the church.

These are the saints that have persevered through trials and hardships. These are the saints who have fought the dragon and emerged victorious. And here we read they are singing a new song, which only they can sing.

It's not that just a few Christians will be able to sing a special song in heaven. But that those who praise Jesus in this life are the saints who will praise him in the next. Maybe you're struggling because you want to praise God but can't. You want to sing a song of worship but part of you doesn't believe. Or maybe life seems so bad you can't bring yourself to think about Jesus. Ask God for help singing a new song of praise to him. Ask his Holy Spirit to so fill you so you can worship Jesus again. Those who worship Jesus in trial will worship him in peace.

But why are all these believers singing songs of praise to Jesus? Why are they singing before the throne

When we worship Jesus, we celebrate his victory over Satan the dragon. (14:2-3) Verses 2-3 are an encouragement to us to celebrate Christ's victory at the cross. In them the author John reminds us Christ has already won the battle. Verse two says what John heard was like "...the sound of harpists playing on their harps." The word for "harp" is actually used three times in this verse. So John heard something more like "... the sound of harpers harping on their harps." Now when you think of war imagery and riding into battle do you think of harps? No, you think of a warrior riding into battle blowing his horn. Maybe you think of a drummer boy from the Revolutionary War. The harp is a wedding instrument. When we think of harps, we think of weddings. Throughout Revelation the word for harp reminds us of heaven. And here the great voice is like harps because the multitudes are celebrating. They're celebrating Christ Jesus' victory over the the dragon. And they're celebrating the coming marriage feast of the Lamb. Our text even tells us how Jesus won the battle and rescued his people. Verse 3 tells us Jesus "redeemed" his people "from the earth." We worship Jesus because he cared enough to save us from our sins. When we worship Jesus, we celebrate his victory over Satan the dragon.

Don't you find yourself wanting to worship Jesus for what he did? Don't you feel yourself getting caught up in the story? Don't you want to be on the side of the "Red Cross Knight" who slays the "dreadful dragon"? This is one of the reasons we believe in Christianity and the story of Jesus. The author Charles Taylor puts it this way, "'Don't you feel it? Don't you have those moments of either foreboding or on-the-cusp elation where you can't shake the sense that there must be something more?'" C.S. Lewis writes, "If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world."¹ We all know that we're called to something more. This is why I think so many people love the television series "Game of Thrones." In our hearts we know there's nothing greater than fighting a dragon. Christ Jesus has already slain the worst of dragons. Today you can join the great story about Jesus. When we worship Jesus, we celebrate his victory over the dragon. This story isn't an easy one but the ending is good.

Those who follow Jesus in defeat already stand with him in victory. (14:4-5)

Those who follow Jesus in defeat already stand with him in victory. (14:4-5) When we follow Christ, we may lose out in the short term but we'll win in the end. We may have to face the dragon and be tempted by what he has to offer. But if we're riding with Christ, we will know the reward of eternity. So now we need to ask what it means to follow Christ. Our passage gives us four marks that followers of Christ have.

¹ See this article for previous two quotes: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-portal-into-a-secular-age-or-why-the-star-wars-sequels-sucked>

First, followers of Jesus are loyal to him. (14:4a) Verse 4 talks about those “who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins.” In the OT warriors were supposed to maintain ritual purity before war. These were men who would go and do battle on behalf of God. Our text is not describing a literal 144K celibate men with swords. Today “virgins” refers to the army of saints who have “moral purity.”² These are all Christians who are loyal to Jesus. If you are loyal to Jesus, you are one of the 144K. Loyal Christians believe the gospel, love Jesus, and love their neighbors. Loyalty to Jesus means honoring him with how you live everyday. Notice that the OT warriors aren’t pure because they stay out of harm’s way. They don’t show their loyalty to God by separating themselves from culture. They show their loyalty to God by going out to do battle. We also show our loyalty to God by going out to do spiritual battle. When we love our savior as we live among sinners we are loyal to Jesus. First, followers of Jesus are loyal to him.

Second, followers of Jesus talk about him. (14:4-5) Verses 4-5 talk about those “who follow the Lamb” and “in their mouth no lie was found.” Followers of Jesus imitate his example of witnessing about the truth. Jesus was a prophet who spoke the truth about God, heaven, hell, and himself. We share the same message by talking about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. We share the message that if you believe in Jesus, Jesus died for you. He bears the burden of your sinful life and gives you the joy of his sinless life. Are you willing and wanting to share this message? Now you just need to put yourself in the position to talk about him.

It’s not just on missions trips or at church that we talk about Jesus. We share Jesus on our “frontlines,” which are the places we spend the most time. Our “frontlines” are our jobs, our neighbors, our social clubs, and our friends. Are you willing to talk about Jesus on your frontline? Maybe you work at a job where it is really hard or illegal to bring up the topic of Jesus. This week when you go to work, ask God for the opportunity to talk about him. You might be surprised how God can overcome anything. Maybe you don’t have a job but love having friends over. Why not use the gift of hospitality to talk about Jesus? Next time you want to invite your Christian friends over for a meal, don’t do it. Instead, invite your non-Christian friends or acquaintances over. Thank Jesus for the dinner and just see what happens. Second, followers of Jesus talk about him.

Third, followers of Jesus sacrifice for him. (14:4-5) If we’re following Jesus wherever he goes, we first follow him to the cross. The word “blameless” in verse 5 is like the word “spotless” in the OT. In the Old Testament, priests offered spotless lambs as a sacrifice to God. Those who follow Jesus are those who are willing to make sacrifices for him. Right now we as a church are considering a pretty exciting opportunity. We’re praying and seeking the Lord’s guidance about church planting. A church in Westford would like to give us their building to start a new church. If we as a congregation decide to do this, it’s going to be a sacrifice.

The first type of sacrifice that pops into my head is a financial sacrifice. It’s going to cost money to plant a new church. It’s going to cost all the perks of having to give up this church. It’s also going to cost a lot of time and hard work. But I don’t think these are the hardest sacrifices we’ll have to pay. I think the hardest sacrifices will be our relationships. Maybe you’ll go or maybe your close friend, but it’s going to be hard. Your sacrifice is to come before God and lay them down. Father, I love this person and I don’t want them to go. But if this will further the good news about you, here they are. And would somehow our relationships become stronger than ever. Third, followers of Jesus sacrifice for him.

² *Theology of Revelation* by Bauckham, pg 76.

Fourth, followers of Jesus bear fruit. (14:4-5) Verse 4 calls the redeemed the “firstfruits” of God. Firstfruits are the first of the harvest sacred to the Lord. The firstfruits were special to God while the rest was common. This means that you are not common to God, but special. God traded his son Jesus to purchase your soul. God spent everything to buy you. You are God’s most costly possession. Jesus redeemed you but are you living like it? You have the status of firstfruit but are you bearing fruit? Are you a classic reddish-green McIntosh apple fresh off the tree? Are your words, thoughts, and actions flavored with the sweet gospel? If you are a good apple, the world will take notice (Matt 5:16). If you are a good fruit, you will bear good fruit.

First, followers of Jesus are loyal to him. Second, followers of Jesus talk about him. Third, followers of Jesus sacrifice for him. Fourth, followers of Jesus bear fruit.

I really like the ending to the children’s book *Saint George and the Dragon*. There’s a picture of a dead dragon sprawled over acres of land. Timid peasants walk around it afraid to touch its claws and scales. The people are amazed by how big and bad it was. But it’s so dead now a small child can touch its claws. Christ Jesus, our “dragon-slayer” has defeated Satan. Do you want to follow him into victory? If you believe, than you share in his victory. The storybook ends with a wedding between the “Red Cross Knight” and princess “Una.” One day soon Christ will also come for his bride the church as a reward for his victory. The wedding feast hasn’t come yet but even now the wedding harps are playing. Those who follow Jesus in defeat already stand with him in victory.