

Is God “good” in Revelation? Revelation 14:6-20

This morning we're going to read through the next section of Revelation, and my goal this morning through this passage, is to address a question that we probably need to attempt to answer as we're reading through this difficult book. The question I'm referring to is voiced in different ways, but the basic question we need to consider is “how can a God who is good, bring about all these terrible things on the Earth?” Another way to say it might be “Why would a God who is good and forgiving, bring about eternal judgement to people?” Again it's voiced in different ways, but the basic premise is a question of God's goodness, fairness, mercy, patience, love- in light of what we read in Revelation that He has decreed will happen in the future.

Perhaps you yourself have asked these types of questions, or perhaps you have heard *others* voice these types of questions- and there's nothing wrong with that- these are good questions to wrestle with, to work through, and attempt to answer. And in Revelation chapter 14, there's a progression of events recorded that will hopefully help us answer this question of God's goodness and fairness. Another way I have heard this question phrased is in the context of those who have never heard the name of Jesus. The question is often voiced something like this- "what happens to those who have never heard the gospel and haven't had the opportunity to believe in Jesus- will God judge them and send them to Hell?" The question is asking is God good and fair if He would punish those who have never heard of Jesus. Now, the Bible doesn't tackle these types of question directly, but there are 2 solid themes woven throughout the Old and New Testament- that I think we need to consider, even before we read from Revelation 14, that should offer some help in answering these questions.

The first theme is that the Bible repetitively emphasizes that God is indeed good, fair, and just. There is verse after verse after verse emphasizing this truth. I imagine it being emphasized so much because *it is* so easy to begin to doubt this as a result of difficult life circumstances. God's goodness, fairness, justice is emphasized so much probably because God knows it is so much part of human nature to start questioning His character in these areas when we see or experience things that are tough in this world. In fact, this was the very type of question planted in the minds of the very first human beings- Adam and Eve there in the Garden of Eden. Satan wanted them *not* to trust God, he wanted them to doubt God's goodness- and in that moment, Adam and Eve chose to believe that God *did not* have their best interests in mind and that He was withholding good things from them. So we should probably recognize that this is part of our default programming, and in response to that implanted temptation- we should allow scripture to remind us, and remind us, and remind us of God's goodness, fairness, justice, mercy. *"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His faithfulness is everlasting."* (1 Chronicles 16:34) *The Lord is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.* (Psalm 145:9) Jesus expresses His goodness in statements like this: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly."* (John 10:10) There are verses in the book of Acts, in Romans, 1 Timothy stating God doesn't show favoritism, discrimination, racism, or prejudice to anyone, but rather God judges every individual fairly. Ephesians describes God as being "rich in mercy." (Mercy, mercy, mercy dollar bills) There are verses everywhere reminding us of who God is, confirming these attributes. And any time we experience circumstances, or read Bible verses that would *seem* contrary to the goodness of God- we must remember the overwhelming amount of actions and verses that testify of the truth that God is indeed good. We must aim to make *that* understanding our default setting.

The second theme we see woven throughout scripture is that God *wants* to forgive, redeem, bless, bring people into right relationship with Him. And He goes to great lengths to do this. He is not portrayed as the angry God who is just looking for someone to vaporize. God sent Jonah to Nineveh to share the good news of forgiveness and mercy to a people so steeped in evil practices. Romans 9 interprets God as being merciful and compassionate to Pharaoh back in Genesis, choosing to raise him up so that he would demonstrate His power in him- but Pharaoh chose to harden his own heart, and yet God still demonstrated His power. Over and over again we see in what the prophets said and wrote that God gives warning after warning, patiently allowing sufficient time for people to choose Him over selfishness and wrong. And these warnings were not just sent out to the people of Israel, but to many other nations as well. Jesus expressed God's desire for people to turn to Him and receive forgiveness and blessing through commanding His followers to go out into the world and tell all the people groups across the world of the good news of Jesus' teaching. Romans 1 states that even from the beginning of time, God has made individuals aware of His goodness, and aware of their unrighteousness- and that everyone has a choice to respond with giving honor and thanks to God, or to respond by suppressing the truth that they know and darkening their hearts. In other words, even for those who have never heard the name of Jesus, God has somehow given opportunity to respond to Him with what little knowledge they have. It's not in God's character to catch people off guard, to surprise them with punishment- no, He is good, fair, merciful, just and *wanting* people to find Him. He is patient... *“not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)*

And so, in bringing to mind these 2 themes of His goodness and His active work in warning people and giving opportunity for people to turn to Him and receive His forgiveness and mercy, in light of all the verses I've presented and so many others that say the same things- in light of all this- does it sound right that God would send someone to Hell

without giving them opportunity to respond to Him? Does that sound like something God would allow? No! As I mentioned, Romans 1 tells us that God does in fact give *everyone* opportunity to respond to Him, no matter what level of knowledge they do or don't have. We know that Jesus is the only way to God the Father- no one comes to the Father God except through *Him*- but we must assume that God does reveal Himself in some way to individuals living in isolated uncontacted jungle tribes- giving some sort of opportunity to respond to Him in saving faith- applying the work of Jesus to their life as a result of their response to Him calling their heart- regardless of what knowledge they have or don't have. Now, this concept does not excuse us from being missional minded- this logic does not exempt us from following Jesus' command to go out to all the nations to teach, but it does seem to fit what we know of God's character revealed to us in scripture, offering some comfort, and defense for His goodness and fair judgment.

And so, if scripture tells us that this has been God's character and intent throughout all of history, and that God does not change his character and desires as do humans- then we should 100% expect God to continue to show His goodness, fairness, mercy, patience, and continue to give opportunities to receive forgiveness- all the way up through even the events of Revelation- yet with one disclaimer. God's goodness and fairness have no limit, but we see in scripture that God's mercy and patience *do* have a limit. Eventually, after many rejected attempts to draw individuals into relationship with Him, He will eventually turn that person over to exactly what they want (distance from Him). And the reason He does this is because a requirement of His goodness, is that He cannot force Himself upon anyone. That would violate Him being good. A dictator who forces his subjects to obey him like robots is not inherently good. In contrast, giving people freedom of choice is good. Another aspect of God's goodness is the fact that He has promised a world of goodness for those who are in right relationship with Him. And here there is potential for conflict- God is good in giving

people choice, but He is also good in promising a world of goodness. The truth of these two statements could easily clash with each other- if the people who God has been good to by giving them choice, if they choose they don't like goodness, and don't want to live in a world of goodness God has promised. So, how does a good God then, in that situation, remain good and still give people choice, while also bringing into existence a world of good where people who want to do bad things don't exist?

Well, He does it just like the Bible presents to us- patiently, mercifully, lovingly attempting to reason with mankind, sending representatives to us, inviting us over and over to choose His good ways and choose His world of goodness- but eventually He in His goodness, has to bring about the world of goodness that He has promised. And this is where His righteous, good justice through judgment comes into play. Eventually those who don't want to do good, who don't want to live in a world of goodness, must be removed so that those who *do* want to live in a world of goodness can truly do that as God promised. This transition season from limitless free will to a world of goodness freewill is what the book of Revelation is describing. It will be the biggest reality shift humankind has ever experienced.

Look with me at Revelation chapter 14, verses 6-13. Follow along with me in your Bible, or from a Bible in front of you in the pew rack, or you can follow along with the verses on the screens- but let's read through the passage and then we'll take a closer look at what's being said. **Rev 14:6-13...**

What we have described here is yet another example of God's goodness in wanting people to have all the facts, so they can make an educated decision concerning their future. During this time of transition in which the world we know will be torn down so as to accommodate a much better world, we have described an angel coming to preach an

“eternal gospel.” I love that. As far as I know, I believe this is the only place in the Bible that uses the phrase the “eternal gospel.” The eternal good news, God’s plan from even the beginning of creation, is the good news that doesn’t ever go away- it’s eternal. The plan doesn’t change, it’s been consistent and *will be* consistent- from the beginning of time to the end of this world. Just in case you have been told other wise, Christianity is the oldest religion known to man. It’s the one and only original, always has been, always will be. And here is how the “eternal” gospel seems to be defined: fear, give glory to, worship- the God who created everything. Bro, that’s so simple. Obviously those of us who have studied the Bible know that Jesus is God, and we understand that fearing, giving glory to, worshiping God is expressed through following His plan of salvation- surrendering to God who revealed Himself as Jesus, who died on the cross, and rose again three days later- yes, but to boil down that Gospel message to the simplest of terms and requirements for someone who has no spiritual knowledge whatsoever- fear, give glory to, worship the Creator God. Period. I mean, I think the bar is set pretty low here.

Fear God- the English word “fear” is probably not really the best word to translate from the Greek. The idea is not to be terrified in trembling fear of God, but rather to “fear” Him in the sense of maintaining a deep sense of reverence, deep respect, admiration, understanding- of His great power, purity, presence, and authority.

Give glory to God- God is glorious in Himself, we don’t give Him glory in that sense, we can’t add to His inherent substance of glory and awe- but we “give Him glory” by honoring, praising Him, acknowledging the goodness and glory of His character.

Worship God- the word “worship” is derived from an old English word that originally conveyed the idea of “worth-ship.” The idea behind the word is to personally ascribe *worth, value-* to God. To “worship” is to

recognize and express how much God is *worth* to you, expressing that worth through the words we say, the words we sing, the thoughts we think, the lives we live. We live a life of worth-ship, treasuring God as being highly valuable in our lives.

This is the eternal, simple Gospel that has existed from the beginning of time and that will remain throughout all of history. This is the Gospel that God desired Adam and Eve to respond to. This is the Gospel for which the Old Testament law of Moses was created for. This is the Gospel the prophets preached. This is the Gospel Jesus taught. This is the Gospel you and I are commanded to teach. This is the Gospel I believe Paul was referring to in Romans 1 that I mentioned earlier. This is the simple, eternal Gospel that has been announced and will be announced to every single individual everywhere on Earth before time is up and God rids the world of all evil so that His world of goodness can be enjoyed between Himself and the people who see fit to fear, glorify, and worship Him.

The 2nd angel, in **verse 8**, announces another truth, another warning- that the beastly nation state entity that will be the predominant world super power at the time of the Great Tribulation- he announces that *that* controlling governing power will fall. The 1st angel says worship God- He's eternal; the 2nd angel says don't worship the world power- it's temporary and is going to fall apart.

The 3rd angel, starting in verse 9, announces a final truth, a final warning- anyone who worships the beast nation state, who trades the truly good Kingdom of Heaven for a bad kingdom of earth posing as a good kingdom, anyone making that trade will experience the full wrath and anger of a just God who in the goodness of His character is creating a world where only goodness exists. God wants all of creation, the whole world, to be completely educated and "in the know." This is part of His goodness, fairness, mercy, justice, patience- no surprises for

anyone- here are the options, the choice is yours, it's up to you. Consider the Creator God as worthy of your focus (your worship), and know that the temporary earthly systems, laws, values are going extinct- but if you choose to still place faith and trust in these temporary earthly systems, laws, values- then know that you'll be burned up along with those systems. The choice is between God who is good and His eternal good Kingdom, OR the beast earth nation system that is bad and will be burned up. God in His goodness, fairness, mercy is describing in the simplest of terms to everyone His plan of rescue and judgement that is coming for the world. No one will be unjustly judged or punished. Everyone will be able to make an educated decision in their mind, and I personally believe this opportunity is not only available for the limited time of the Great Tribulation- I think that as Romans 1 implies, the idea that this eternal gospel opportunity to respond to the Creator God through worship has been available to every individual human being throughout all of history. God's not only being fair in the end times, no- He surely has been fair concerning salvation throughout all of history- but this time of the Great Tribulation will be the very last opportunity for salvation.

Verse 12- here's another plea for Christians to persevere through this time- to not be deceived, to not give in, to not compromise; the stakes are so high. **Verse 13** seems to indicate that during this time, death will be a blessing. A time of rest. Followers of Jesus will no longer feel loss- no, their deeds will go along with them. I'm sure you've heard the statement that you never see a funeral hearse towing a trailer. Right, the point is then stated that you can't take anything with you into the next life- but I want to argue the point that is stated in this verse and elsewhere in the Bible- that yes indeed you are able to take things with you- but not physical objects of value, rather only things that are of even higher value- the life you lived, the good things you attempted, the sacrifices you made, the love you shared, the faith you expressed, the perseverance you displayed, the trials you endured, the acts of

kindness given, the grace extended- will follow along with you, serving as the new currency in the new kingdom- the value never diminishing, the reward never fading.

You know that feeling in life you get when you finally make it through whatever ongoing long problem it is that you've been wrestling with? It's a good feeling, right? But, how long does that feeling last? Typically not very long, you know why? Because usually there's just another problem that comes at you shortly after you solved the previous problem. God's word here is telling us that's *not* going to happen in the Kingdom of Heaven. The good feeling won't go away. The rest won't cease. The value obtained will not be lost.

Verses 14 through the end of the chapter describe the very end, the final event in this transition period- and I believe these verses are describing the same event that chapter 11 and chapter 19 describe, that Matthew 24, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4 all record- when Jesus appears in the sky, believers are gathered to Him as He returns and those who reject Him are eliminated. Check it out, **verses 14-20...**

Here we have described a "harvest" of the whole earth, through 2 separate harvests. No one is left physically alive on earth after this event. Here is another example of how Revelation is presented not in chronological order, but rather there are several descriptions of "the end" that are not each different events, but are all describing different aspects of the same ending event. If you look to your study guide, you'll see that this box down here at the bottom contains all the different descriptions of the "end event" that ushers in the promised Kingdom of God- you'll see this reward/judgement event mentioned all throughout the book, it's the end game that the whole book is pushing the reader to focus on. It's mentioned in chapter 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 19, 20 and then even with grand finale style- in chapters 21 and 22 as the "New Jerusalem" is revealed.

Interpreting Revelation to be chronological would not make any sense- if you peak ahead to the next chapter, you'll see that 7 bowls of wrath are about to be poured out on the earth- and that there are still people on the Earth. That doesn't make any chronological sense if all the people are all harvested out from the Earth in chapter 14. So it's quite obvious the chapters aren't in chronological order. In contrast, it makes much more sense to zoom out and realize that this event of Christ's return, bringing reward and judgement- occurs only once- at the end of the 7 Seals, the 7 Trumpets, the 7 Thunders, the 7 Bowls of Wrath- but the description of what happens when Jesus returns is peppered throughout the whole book. That makes a lot more sense.

And then notice the difference between the 2 harvests. The first harvest will be performed not by an angel, but by one sitting on a cloud who is "like a son of man." As mentioned in the past, "son of man" seemed to be Jesus' favorite title for Himself that He refers to often in the gospels books, and the term is tied to Daniel chapter 7, where "One like a son of man" is described as coming with the *clouds* of heaven, in order to rule as everlasting King in an everlasting Kingdom made from people of all nations and languages. Jesus was speaking in code to a degree- implying that it is *Him* who the book of Daniel is referring to as the everlasting King who would come to rule. With this understanding, it's pretty clear that this first harvest is performed by Jesus, the son of man coming on the clouds, and He is harvesting His followers- believers, Christians- those who have feared, glorified, worshiped the Creator God. (who we know is Jesus)

The 2nd harvest described, starting in verse 17, tells us that it is an angel who harvests the rest of the Earth- the non-believers, those who have rejected the eternal Gospel, those who do *not* fear, glorify, nor worship the Creator God- those will be harvested to judgment. Crushed as grapes in a wine press. And this is uncomfortably graphic, but the

blood of the lives taken in this event will be much. A trail of blood for 1,600 stadia. A stadia was a unit of measurement used in Greek and Roman land surveys, as well as in foot races in the early Greek and Roman Olympic running events. A stadia is actually the word we get our word "stadium" from- as in the idea that a stadium is the venue in which you watch runners run a stadia. The distance of a stadia was the length of the track at Olympia, the original Greek venue for the Olympic Games; and that distance is approximately 192 meters, while a Roman stadia was considered slightly less as 185 meters. In feet that's 600-630 ish feet per stadia. And this is saying 1,600 stadia, which would calculate to be about 184 miles. At the very end of time, just before the installment of God's everlasting Kingdom of goodness- blood flow from the inhabitants of the earth who reject Jesus will run for 184 miles.

That hits pretty hard, right? That's heavy. A lot of our application focus as we study this book has been on making sure that we as followers of Jesus are alert, aware, ready to persevere, knowledgeable so that we're not deceived. But this passage here should break our hearts for those who are resisting God's gentle call and invitation. This passage, yes, makes a plea to make sure we are personally ready for this day of judgment- but if we are living a life of fearing, glorifying, worshiping Jesus the Creator God- and are thus ready to be rescued by Jesus coming on the clouds- then this passage should prompt our hearts to consider those around us and around the world who have yet to make that lifestyle choice. And I know there are well intentioned Christians out there who would thus put a pressure on themselves and on other believers to make sure they're telling people about Jesus- or else it's maybe even their fault if they don't and those people end up getting judged on this day in this manner. And I don't think that's really the Biblical idea. God does the work of drawing hearts to Him, it's *God's* work and it's the responsibility of the *individual* to respond to God's work- however intricate or basic that work may be. But we do have commands from scripture that we are to take part in that work. We have

responsibility as followers of Jesus to share the gospel message of hope, forgiveness, redemption, salvation with others- verbally doing it ourselves, living it out as an example without words, supporting missionaries with prayer and finances, etc- but the idea is not one of pressure and fear that we might screw it up and someone will go to hell because we screwed it up.

No, rather the Biblical idea is that we should actually be able to relax a little, and feel more at ease in sharing with others- knowing that God in His goodness probably already has, or surely will in the near future- be presenting opportunities for them to respond to Him. That takes the weight off of us, and should actually encourage and boost our confidence when speaking to others and asking if we can pray for them- knowing that God isn't going to deny that person fair opportunity to respond to Him. If we understand that God *has* already- or *will* at some point- invite them to take a step towards Him- then all we're doing is joining God in that work that He's already doing and wants to do in their life. The pressure is off- the most we can do is just help serve as a catalyst, help serve as encouragement, a little nudge in the right direction- for that person to chose to take that step in worshipping their Creator.

So I want to encourage you to join me in this mindset as we engage with the world around us. Let's trust that God has been, and is, and will continue to be- truly good, fair, just, merciful. May this understanding free us up, to naturally interact with others around us about the Lord- not feeling pressure to say all the right words, but having a freedom and boldness to speak with others about Jesus knowing that He is already calling their hearts to Him in some way.