

PASSAGE THEME: Christ's ransomed followers gather round His throne, worshipping Him in the splendor of holiness.

SERMON THEME: **Knowing who we are in Christ, this family must set itself, by His grace, to follow Him wherever He goes.**

Intro – The ability to see. Perhaps that's the simplest way to define vision. The ability to see. What happens when that ability is hindered, what if you suffer from presbyopia or myopia (far-sighted or near-sighted). You go to the eye doctor. And you would think it strange if he shook your hand, handed you a pair of glasses and sent you on your way; your vision wouldn't be helped, wouldn't be sharpened, because he didn't find out about *you*. Your eyes, the way you see things now – this is where vision improvement begins. Revelation is a book, not just of visions, but of great vision. John, providentially planted on the island of Patmos, receives from heaven powerful visions of Christ's victory. And what runs throughout these visions is vision – the many portrayals of Christ's victory inspire the reader to a singular vision of the King of kings. The vision we're going to look at this morning will help us see both who we are in Christ and what our ultimate, our overriding and foundational vision for His kingdom ought to be.

Read Revelation 14:1-5

Pray

Nametags: understanding the vision of this vision

It's difficult to hop right into the middle of any book and understand what's going on – so it is with Revelation. So what we need to do first is slap some nametags on the different characters in this passage, figure out the who, what, why, & how about which John is talking. As with every vision of glory and heaven, the center is not you or me or us – the center is God, here God the Son and God the Father. John looks and the first thing he sees is not the multitudes or the living beasts or the elders. The first thing he sees is the Lamb of God, standing on Mount Zion. What is the center, the focus of our vision? It is and must be the Lord Jesus Christ, our Shepherd, our perfect sacrifice, our reigning King, our righteousness. In any healthy church, there will be many, many great things – wonderful people, powerful doctrine, church buildings, programs, preaching and so on – that take up part of the church. But we must never let them compete for the center, the focus; *that* we give to Christ alone because He is worthy and calls us to such a passion for Him that everything else fades into the background.

Gathered around the Lamb of God is the 144,000. Without answering every objection or arguing against every silly idea, we may state plainly that this number is meant to signify or symbolize the entire people of God, the saints from every age, those gone before, those coming after us. This is the true and whole Israel – not a place on a map with borders, not those

physically descended from Abraham, but the whole people of God, including you who have called on Christ in faith. So this is us, this is the church; our vision must begin by knowing ourselves, our identity. It's fascinating to note how John identifies the church, not first with a great number or their worship – the first way the church is identified is “with Him” in v. 1. We are the 144,000 first and foremost because we are “with Him.” The greatest statement about the church, the most wondrous glory are these two words: With Him. Our vision begins with our identity; our identity is being *with* the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That is who we are. If we see this, if we as individuals and as a family find our identity in Christ alone, our vision will sharpen because we will know who we are.

John continues on to report an awesome event – they sing. The church begins to sing and John can scarcely describe it. It's *like* the roar of the highest waterfall – have you ever taken the boat to the base of Niagara Falls? When you get close, there is nothing else you can hear. It's *like* the sound of great and close thunder – at that moment of thunder, what else can you hear? But it's also *like* many harps being played by master musicians. What an interesting contrast: thunder & harps. As one author wrote, the sound is “grand and gentle, lofty and lovely.”

The majestic sound isn't the greatest part; it's *what* they sing. No details except this: it's a new song. New not in the sense of time, but new as you were once old and now made new. It is the song of you who are *new*. We sing this song when we turn to the Psalms. “Sing to him a new song (Ps. 33:3)...He put a new song in my mouth (40:3)...Sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord, all the earth (96:1)...I will sing a new song to you (144:9)...Praise the Lord, sing to the Lord a new song (149:1).”

Because it's the song of those new in Christ, you who don't know Christ as Savior are sadly excluded from this song, told that you simply cannot learn it. At first glance, this might not seem fair, until you hear the good news: this song, this newness of life is Christ's offer to you in the gospel. If you would be a part of the great congregation, if you would be made new and given a new song to sing with your whole life – turn to Christ. Forsake your sins, confess your guilt, and cast everything upon Jesus. He will make you new.

This newness is important for the church's vision as well. Here John says that the singers of the new song are those who have been ransomed or purchased from this world. Second, they are those who have not defiled themselves with women. This is not a commandment for the church to promote lifelong abstinence. It is a powerful picture, just like the story of Hosea, of spiritual fidelity portrayed by sexual fidelity. Just as chastity and purity are wonderful things for a bride to offer her new husband, so purity of life and faith is what we offer

to Christ, who is the bridegroom of the church. Paul was passionate about this idea: **2 Corinthians 11:2** *I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. We are those made holy by the Spirit of God.*

You singers of the new song are also called firstfruits, the peak of the harvest, the goal of what God is doing here on earth. Being firstfruits means that we're valuable and precious to our Father in heaven, not because we deserve to be, but because He loves us.

Perhaps most importantly for the subject of vision, the singers of the new song (v. 4) are those who "follow the Lamb wherever He goes." We are identified by the one we gather around. We are made new by Jesus, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. We move forward, advancing the kingdom, by following Him. How contrary to the world's wisdom is the mind of God – the world values entrepreneurs and risk-takers and severe boldness. God calls for followers, the poor in Spirit, those completely and joyfully dependent on another. The church is identified not by leadership or power or enthusiasm or any other great ideal – the church is identified by following another. *This is the heart of our vision: we will follow Christ wherever He goes.* It only remains for us to ask, where? Where will we follow? Let's think back over the past few weeks and see where Christ would lead us.

We will follow Christ for His glory, into His glory

The greatest aim of the follower ought to be the greatest aim of the one being followed. What, then, is the aim of Christ? What is central to the heart of our Lord? The night of his betrayal before his death, Jesus poured out His heart to the Father; He prayed for many things – for the disciples, for unity in the church, for you and me. But listen to how He began this prayer: "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you..." The purpose, the heartbeat of Christ is the glory of the Triune God. All that our Lord did was for the glory of God. Saving sinners, healing wounded, teaching truth, raising the dead, comforting the lonely – the goal was always to glorify God. Even while He stared into the eyes of the hurting and touched the eyes of the blind, Christ's eyes were always set on glory. Are we following? Will God's glory be the beginning and end of our vision or a mere afterthought?

The Bible tells us that God is glorified in creation, the visible outcome of His powerful word. God is even more glorified in redemption, the results of Christ's obedient life, death & resurrection. God's glory also shines forth in the holiness of His saints. This is what John saw: a people who were pure, a people called "blameless," in whose mouth is no lie. To seek God's glory means holiness, blamelessness...and we hang our head because God's glory surely isn't found in *my* life. But John isn't speaking just about *you* – that phrase about "in whose mouth is no lie" is taken from the Old Testament. First from Isaiah 53, the prophesy of the Suffering

Servant, a prophesy about Jesus. Ultimately, only Christ is the one who has no lie in His mouth, only Christ is the blameless one. Second, Zephaniah prophesied: **3:13** *“those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue.”* We will become blameless; we will progress in holiness when Christ is our passion and His glory our driving force. Christ will not marry an ugly bride. Jesus will not join Himself to those who will remain eternally sinful. Christ, then, is working to make His people holy – and we will follow Him in His work by desiring holiness, by valuing worship over anything the world has to offer, by submitting to Christ’s commands, especially when they conflict with our heart’s desires.

We will follow Christ for His glory and into His glory. Whatever we do, we will ask ourselves, “Does this glorify our risen Lord?” We will keep worship as the center of everything we do. Our vision will begin and end with the glory of God.

We will follow Christ into His world with His Word

For His glory, then, where did Christ go? He was equal with the Father, He had infinite glory, eternal power and majesty, yet He came to a womb, came to a manger, came to a people (*His* people) who did not love Him, He came to a world full of enemies, to forty days without food and the greatest temptation ever faced, to a short preaching career of three years – most of which was spent speaking to people who would later abandon Him – He came to betrayal, to false convictions, to spit and to spite, to a death painful beyond imagination. The eternal God, came to be a man, came to die for men, to redeem those who stand as His enemies. Christ came to the world. We will follow Him into the world.

Christ came to this world not to be gawked at or fawned over, but to serve the Father by loving the unlovely. He came not to be served, but to be a servant. He, the King of kings, came to wash dusty and smelly feet. Why? Because He looked at the multitudes and His heart broke. They were (as they are now) sheep without a shepherd. So He came to serve. We, then, will serve as well. We will serve with the compassion and heart and vision of Christ. We will see people for what they are: not hate them as horrid, ugly sinners, but pity them as sheep without a shepherd. We will wash feet, we will feed the hungry, we will help the helpless, we will visit those in prison, we will clothe the naked, we will bring brownies to our neighbors and lend them our tools, we will not be fighters but servants...we will follow Christ into this world with service. We will serve because Christ served, because this menial task of service is how Christ sets the foundation stones of His kingdom.

Christ also came to bring the kingdom, to bring good news, a light shining in darkness. He came and said crazy things like: whoever believes in me won’t die, but have everlasting life.

He showed people how to escape the condemnation of the impossible law. The day of His death, a man was hung next to him, a man with nothing to offer, no way to show obedience, no way to prove his faith, but yet Jesus told him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." There's that idea again: *with me*. Jesus came to the world to make people *with Him*. We will follow Him. We will go out into this world and tell people that they, too, can be *with God*. They can be forgiven, they can have peace, they can know grace. We will follow Christ into His world with His word. We are not trailblazers or inventors...we will walk in the footsteps of our great Shepherd, keeping our eyes always on Him, calling the lost sheep to come, feed their souls on Him, live life in His love, His light and easy yoke.

We will follow Christ as He loves us and dies for us

Christ then took those sheep and made them a body, a family. To cover this family with His righteousness, Christ died for us. To make sure the family works the way it should, Christ says, "Follow me. I died for you; now it's your turn." Even as we go out into the world, how will the world know us? How will the lost, dying, starving sheep know that we are the saved, living and well-fed sheep? They will know by our love. Following Christ into love means that we find true value in every member of this family. Value brought not by beauty or attractiveness or station in life, but value brought by being united to Christ. Value because of what Christ can do with us, with you, with me. We must believe that each is made in the image of God, that each has a vital role to play in this family. Because Christ died for this family, we must honor those in the family, placing others' needs above our own, committing to care for each other. When we each serve this family as Christ did, God will bring unity and peace, interdependence and multiplication of laborers.

To put it differently, we will love as Christ loved. Wherever He goes, right? Christ washed feet, humbled Himself to far greater depths than we know – we will follow. We will humble ourselves to each other, put to death our desires for the sake of each other, we will deal with sin the way God wants us to (not with bitterness or backbiting), we will weep with each other, we will believe that Christ is doing great things with us. We will follow Christ to love.

We will follow Christ to victory

Finally, Christ our King advances. We ask the question, "Why should we plant a church?"...this is at the heart of the answer. Christ is advancing and we are those who follow Him. This means, although we are always joyful with what Christ has done in our midst, we are never satisfied, we are never fully happy with the way things are, we want more holiness, more grace, more churches.

He came and humbled Himself to death, even the death of crucifixion. But after three short days, He rose from the dead, conquering the last enemy, and He ascended to the Father's right hand where He actively and powerfully rules His entire kingdom. Is there any doubt in our minds about the truths of Revelation, the truths of Christ's coming victory, the truths of worldwide conquest – is there any doubt of these things? Christ has promised to build His church and that even the gates of hell will not withstand us. Regardless of the level of my faith or my ability to see the kingdom growing, this is God's promise, that He will build His church, and we will follow Christ to the victory He has promised. This following-to-victory comes about through our humble submission to our commission: go into the world, tell them the message we have been given, bring them into the church, make disciples, teach them and baptize them. We follow Christ to victory as He multiplies disciples in our midst and through our labors, as He multiplies the church through the discipling of our children.

Let us hold to then, to this vision, a vision of glory, of service and evangelism, a vision of love and sacrifice, a vision of multiplication and victory. If that's too much to remember, let us hold to this: we will be those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. May the living God be glorified in His church.