

“*A Tale of Two Cities*” – Revelation Part 15  
Revelation 14:1-13

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of disbelief; it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

So begins Charles Dickens classic *A Tale of Two Cities*. Its opening words convey the picture that we’ll see this morning as we continue our journey through Revelation. In this passage, we’re introduced to two “cities” – one characterized by wisdom, belief, light & hope, and the other by foolishness, disbelief, darkness & despair. And it is these two cities that represent the destiny of every human being who has ever lived.

Here in chapter 14, we again see God at work through His angelic agents. And as these different angels carry out the tasks that God has given them, we are given a picture of the marked contrast between two cities – Babylon and Mount Zion.

First, what do these two cities represent? We’ll take Mount Zion first. While the temple mount of Jerusalem is likely partially in view here, Mount Zion also represents something far greater than just its historical location, as we see in Heb. 12:22-23: “*You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, **the heavenly Jerusalem**. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church ... whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.*”

*Mount Zion represents the entire kingdom of God and those who dwell permanently in the presence of Jesus and the Father.*

And while Babylon was also a physical place, it too represents something more than just a location. Before it was known as Babylon, the plain in Shinar was called Babel. We discover it in Genesis 11, which gives us the first specific example of idolatry. The tower of Babel was not merely an attempt to reach up to God, but rather an attempt to exalt man. Gen. 11:4: “*Let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves.*” Thus began *Babylon – a false system that replaced the worship of God with the worship of self.*

And as we will see today – the *citizenship requirements*, the *lifestyle* and the *final destiny* for the inhabitants of these two cities could not be more different.

## I. CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENTS

In the U.S., one can become a citizen in one of two ways. In most cases, those born in the country automatically become citizens. But one can also become a citizen through the process of naturalization, which involves residency requirements and other steps. [Pause] In the spiritual realm, Babylon and Mount Zion have requirements for citizenship as well.

### **Babylon – be born**

Every person born on this earth automatically becomes a citizen of Babylon. Nothing else is required. That is essentially the point that Paul is making in Eph. 2:1-3: “*You were dead in your sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world ... Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*”

Every single one of us was born into the citizenship of Babylon without having to take any further action. Because of our sinful nature, we were idolaters, serving ourselves. And as such, we were completely deserving of God’s wrath.

Here in Revelation 14, people did not become citizens of Babylon because they received the mark of the beast or because they modeled wickedness, but rather they engaged in those activities because they were *already* citizens ... born in Babylon.

### **Mount Zion – faith in Jesus**

The citizens of Mount Zion are identified in v. 12 as those who “*keep their faith in Jesus.*” That is the only means by which anyone can become a citizen of Mt Zion; a fact confirmed in Jn. 1:12-13: “*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, but born of God.*”

We become children of God and citizens of Zion not as a result of our birth, or even our own efforts. The only citizenship test that we have to pass is that of placing our faith in Jesus – surrendering to his supremacy.

Before we move on, it's important to point out: When it comes to our spiritual citizenship, there is no such thing as dual citizenship. In the physical world, it is possible for a person to have dual citizenship; but spiritually, that is not possible, as these words of Jesus make clear: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other." (Luke 16:13).

Every person ever born is either a citizen of Babylon or a citizen of Zion. That citizenship is determined solely by whether or not the redeeming work of Christ has been applied to us through the gift of faith. Left to our own devices, we remain citizens of Babylon. But if you believe in his name, if Christ is Lord of your life, you are a citizen of Mount Zion.

## II. LIFESTYLE

The lifestyles of the citizens of Babylon and of Mount Zion are also quite distinctive:

### **Babylon – fear man and gives him glory**

The citizens of Babylon are characterized by their fear of man. That is why they are willing to take on "*the mark of the beast*" in pursuit of the securities that this world has to offer. Those with the mark of the beast are those who have chosen to be identified with the fallen world – with Babylon. And, since this book is largely symbolic in nature, we should not try to literalize the mark of the beast in specific ways. Those marked by the world are those influenced by the fears of this world. Keep that as the focus.

In fact, the fear of man is so great that the people of Babylon are characterized in verse 8 as those who are intoxicated with "*the maddening wine of her adulteries.*" While sexual immorality is part of this, the larger idea here is that of *spiritual* immorality, in which people have become caught up in the idolatry that focuses on self-satisfaction and seeks to find security in people and things.

There is little doubt that the easiest way to survive during the Last Days is to just "go along to get along" – a pattern that Jesus rebukes in several of the 7 churches ... This temptation to go along to get along will be a testing ground for those who profess Christ as Lord.

I'm convinced that those who follow after Christ will be able to endure whatever comes. But one real challenge is going to be when families are threatened – when we have to

figure out how we're going to feed our children; when we can't get the medicine that our spouse needs to live; when our loved ones are in danger because of our faith in Christ ...

This isn't just something that's going to happen in the future – it's happening right now. November is a time set aside to pray for persecuted Christians facing many dangers and many griefs in many countries around the world. We encourage you to learn more about how you can support/pray for these Christians/families (Voice of the Martyrs, Facebook).

And while our lives in St. Albans look incredibly different from those in these countries (so much so that it is difficult even comparing them); in this life, we will encounter forms of persecution because we belong to Christ. Consider the situations in our lives where it would just be easier to go along to get along. The tendency is for us to think that it really isn't a big deal, that there is really no harm in compromising with the world in my job, or cheating on my taxes ... But when we open that door, it's really hard to shut it.

There is no doubt that “going along to get along” may make our lives easier and more comfortable in the short run. But when we're tempted to do that, we need to heed these words of Jesus: *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”* (Matthew 7:13)

### **Mount Zion – fear God and give Him glory**

In vs. 6-7, as the first angel flies overhead with the message of *“the eternal gospel,”* he calls people to *“Fear God and give Him glory.”* The reason that they need to do that is given in the rest of the verse: *“the hour of his judgement has come.”* It's imminent. Once again, we see God's mercy in action as He extends the offer of His grace one last time.

After thousands of years of the church proclaiming the gospel, after the faithful witness of the 144,000, there are still many who have refused God's gift of forgiveness and new life. So God gives humanity one last chance to place their faith in Jesus. He gives them one last chance to quit vainly fearing man and start reverently fearing God.

Because of their reverent fear of God, the citizens of Mount Zion are then able to... *live a life of distinctiveness.* In v. 12, they are described as those *“who keep God's commands and remain faithful to Jesus.”* The citizens of Zion clearly do not *earn* their citizenship

based on keeping the commands of God. Rather, it is *because* they are citizens by God's grace that they are able to live a life that distinguishes them from the world.

And then God will use that distinctiveness as we serve as His agents to bring the gospel to others. In other words, God does not call us to work "undercover." We are not to blend in with the world around us. We are not to "go along to get along." We are called to live our lives in a way that makes it apparent that we are citizens of Mount Zion and of its King.

### III. FINAL DESTINY

Finally, we see that the final destiny of the citizens of each city is dramatically different:

#### **Babylon – God's judgment**

There is direct connection between vs. 8 & 10. Listen again: "*Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations **drink** the maddening wine of her adulteries.*" The sin of rebellion has affected all peoples – they have embraced the life of defiance, living for self rather than their Creator. They have *drunk* the poison of sin.

V. 10 – "*They too will **drink** the wine of God's fury, which has been poured **full strength** into the cup of his wrath.*" In John's day, people typically diluted wine with 2 parts water to every part wine. But God's righteous judgment will not be diluted – it will fully come to pass. And so, the maddening wine of sin becomes the cup of their condemnation. In other words, the citizens of Babylon bring the judgment of God upon themselves.

Then we come to the graphic parts of the passage where we would prefer to turn away ... but that is the opposite of what Jesus does. The rest of verse 10 says, "*They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.*"

But we often hear of God's judgement as eternal *separation* from God. So, how is the torment of those belonging to Babylon "*in the presence*" of the Lamb? [P] Remember, it is crucial that we don't take verses out of their context. We need to keep at the forefront the *reason* for the revelation and the central message contained within.

And the very next verse of our passage is a summation of that message. V. 12 – "*This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.*" The revelation of the Lamb, given to John to write, given to the church

to proclaim, in days of intense suffering, uncertainty, and injustice is this: *The Lamb, the Righteous One, is coming – to enact his perfect justice and to deliver his own – so endure!*

That helps to inform what the previous verse means when it says that the final fate of those belonging to Babylon will be in the presence of the Lamb. The point being made is that the unrepentant will be unable to evade the reality of the holy Lamb who they once ignored

Another picture of this is Phil. 2:9-11, where **all** will acknowledge Christ as Lord – “*God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*”

The citizens of Babylon will no longer be able to ignore or denounce the Lamb who was slain. We all will witness His glory, and we will acknowledge him one way or the other. For those of Babylon, it will mean forsaking forever the grace-filled, life-giving relationship found in Christ alone. [P] But then there are those of Mount Zion ...

### **Mount Zion – God’s grace**

Instead of the death they deserve, the redeemed of Mount Zion experience God’s endless grace. And one precious form of that grace is found in v. 13. For the people of God who patiently endure, who remain faithful to Jesus, the Voice of heaven speaks these words of assurance: “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ... ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.’*”

You’ve likely heard these words at a graveside service. This verse is why so many tombstones say, “Rest in Peace.” The God who has redeemed us at the cost of His own Son – the Lamb who bore our sin on the cross – promises the citizens of Mount Zion, the recipients of his grace: *Your suffering will not last. Your long labor will come to an end.* Do not despair for those who die in the Lord. They have received a blessing greater than any yet to be experienced on this earth – they have entered an eternal rest enjoying an eternal relationship with their eternal God. The *grace* of God that will never end. [P]

So the question each of us must answer is this: *Are you a citizen of Babylon or Zion?* [P] In Babylon, we find foolishness, disbelief, darkness and despair. In Zion, we find wisdom, faith, light and hope.

Have you surrendered to the Lordship of the Lamb? Have you turned from the poisoned cup of Babylon, trusting in Christ who bore the cup of God's judgment on the cross, judgment that should have been ours? Have you received the grace, forgiveness, and life that only He can provide and has provided?

If you have yet to entrust your life to the Lamb, we invite you to change citizenship – to become a child of the King. You can do that right now. Go to him in prayer ... if you would like someone to pray with you, I, or one of our elders, would be honored to pray ...

If you are already a citizen of Mount Zion, then there are several ways that you can respond to God today:

1) We need to *give thanks* that our citizenship assures us of eternal rest in the presence of Jesus.

2) We must *evaluate our lives*, looking for areas where we have given into the temptation to “go along to get along.” We need to honestly ask whether we are living lives that distinguish us as followers of Jesus. And where we find that we have fallen short, we need to repent.

3) We need to make sure that *our hope* is not based on any person or anything, but that it *comes from our faith in Jesus* who has provided us with eternal life and eternal rest.

That is how we will endure, no matter what we may face in this life. And that is the Good News that we need to share with a desperate world.