

Triumphant Saints, Part 2

Scripture: Revelation 14:2-5

Code: 66-50

Let's open our Bible to Revelation chapter 14. We have before us a wonderful text, the opening five verses of this chapter which we began to peruse last Lord's day. Let me read it to you, Revelation 14:1, "I looked and behold the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders, and no one could learn the song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb and no lie was found in their mouth, they are blameless."

Scripture has some marvelous descriptive terms for Christians with which all of us are familiar. It calls us children of God, sometimes translated sons of God. It calls us new creations. It calls us the elect. It calls us Christians. It calls us kings and priests unto God. It calls us saints and all of those terms have some special nuance of richness. And they indicate to us the elevated identity that we as Christians enjoy.

But Scripture also calls us in another category some terms that speak of the triumphant nature of the Christian experience. We're called overcomers. We are called victors. We are called super-conquerors. Scripture even says that we are always triumphant in Christ. We who know the Lord Jesus Christ are the winners. We are the conquerors. We are the victors and we are the triumphant. There's a certain level of invincibility to us because of God's grace and power in Christ.

In spite of this identity as overcomers and winners and conquerors and super-conquerors, we still lose the battle to the world, the flesh and the devil. We don't have to but sadly we do. The question really then is...how can we live up to our identity? If we are overcomers, if we have overcome the world, if our faith is that which overcomes the world, if in the knowledge of the truth of God we have overcome the evil one, if we are no longer in bondage, slaves to sin in the flesh, why do we lose? What is the key? How can we be triumphant? What are the components that produce triumphant Christians?

I really think, in a wonderful way, that question is answered right here in this text. Here we meet an amazing group of men and this amazing group of a hundred and forty-four thousand men demonstrate to us the components of triumphant Christianity. They are a hundred and forty-four thousand Daniels, if they will, uncompromising, unflinching, undaunted and undefeated. And we ask the question...what made them so uniquely triumphant? And the answer we shall find right here in this text.

First of all, we've been asking the question already, last week, who are they? And I don't want to beg the issue but just to remind you, and also for those who weren't here to bring you up to speed, the hundred and forty-four thousand are a group of men chosen by God to preach the gospel to the world during the time of the Great Tribulation. At the end of the age, prior to the return of Jesus Christ, there will be a period of time called the Great Tribulation. The Lord will identify a hundred and forty-four thousand men who will preach the gospel all over the world. That is about three times the world missionary force for Christianity right now. This is a very large force and a very potent and powerful one.

As you remember, we first met them back in chapter 7. And I would invite you to just briefly remind yourself of that. We met them in chapter 7, down in verse 4. And there we see the number of the bond-servants of our God mentioned in verse 3 who are sealed, being one hundred and forty-four thousand. And they were sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel, that is twelve thousand from every tribe. And there were tribes listed there, therefore making a hundred and forty-four thousand.

Now they are introduced in chapter 7 in answer to the question at the end of chapter 6. The question in chapter 6, at the very end, is...who is able to stand? When the great day of the wrath of God and the wrath of the Lamb comes, when the day of the Lord hits, who is able to stand? And immediately we meet some people who are able to stand. They are sealed and protected by the living God Himself so that they can go through this period of time, survive the fury of forthcoming judgment described by the sixth and seventh seal, even surviving what is described in the seven trumpets and the seven-bowl judgments, all the way to the end until the Lord returns. And during the time of their life and the time of their survival, they will preach the gospel.

We know the effect of their ministry. Chapter 7 and verse 9, "A great multitude which no one could count from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palm branches were in their hands." In great measure that redeemed community that has been martyred and taken to heaven is the fruit of the labor of these one hundred and forty-four thousand, as well as others, namely the two witnesses, the angel preaching the everlasting gospel and others who proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

Now remember, judgment has come to the earth. It's been going on on the earth for a long time by now, coming nearer to the end, we must be near to the seventh year of this kind of thing. There have

been wars and famines and earthquakes and plagues and death and sin is now running rampant over the world without restraint. People are deceived in to false religion by the false prophet, deceived in to following the Antichrist. And then the false prophet gives up his world religion in favor of worshiping only the Antichrist who blasphemes God. Through all of this time Jews will be being massacred as will Christians. It's going to be a fearsome time of judgment. By the time you come to the sixth seal mentioned at the end of chapter 6, the Antichrist will have already abominated the temple, the world religion will have died and only the worship of Antichrist as God will be tolerated. The whole world will be deceived by the false prophet through a false resurrection and lying signs and wonders. The slaughter of Jews and Christians will escalate.

And during this time the sealed hundred and forty-four thousand will preach the gospel right up to the end. And I believe they will survive. That's the whole point of their being sealed. They are being protected so that they cannot be killed. And they will be the instruments in great measure by which God redeems a multitude of Gentiles who are described in Matthew, for example, chapter 25, where they are described as the sheep who enter the kingdom and Jews who will also enter the kingdom as indicated in Revelation chapter 12. So we've just reviewed that briefly.

Now among those who survive, there will be Gentiles who survive and are going into the kingdom alive, there will be Jews, of course, who survive and go into the kingdom alive. And among the survivors will be the one hundred and forty-four thousand. You can go back now to chapter 14, you saw them in chapter 7 being sealed at the time of the sixth seal, just before the day of the Lord which is the last series of terrible judgments. Now in chapter 14 you see them again and they're standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb. That is a picture of Christ having come back and they are there at His return ready to go with Him into the kingdom which means they have survived through the holocaust of that judgment.

I believe, as I said last time, it is most likely the hundred and forty-four thousand who will then go into the kingdom and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ all over the world during the kingdom period. They will no doubt continue to be the preachers in the millennium as they were uniquely in the time of Great Tribulation. They are the greatest preaching force the world will ever see. I don't want to beg the issue but I would like to mention to you that they are men. They are all men, all one hundred and forty-four thousand of them, because God has always set apart men for the preaching ministry. And we'll say more about that in a moment.

There they are in chapter 14 triumphant. They have survived the world's worst time of disaster and death. They have lived through things that we have seen already in the book of Revelation from even before the time they were sealed and then after the time they were sealed when things escalated, they survived even that and you can be sure the world tried to kill as many of them as possible but couldn't do it. They are all in tact, all one hundred and forty-four thousand of them at the end. God protected them and allowed them to preach through that time and I believe will allow them to preach

the gospel to the people who are born during the kingdom who will need to be saved.

Now what was the source of their victory? How did they triumph? What was the secret of their invincibility? And that's what we see in the text. First of all, we looked at this last time, power...power. You will note there in verse 1 that they had the name of the Son of God, the Lamb, and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. In other words, they were identified as belonging to God and that identification was not only an identification of possession, but it was an identification of protection. In other words, they were sealed so that nothing could touch them, nothing could harm them. And they were, to borrow another Scripture, kept by the power of God. And herein lies the real key, the sovereign divine transcendent side of this, the God who promised and the God who possessed is the God who keeps. That's the divine side of triumphant Christianity, the one who makes a promise has the power to perfect it. They are standing there with the Lamb in His coming glory on Mount Zion intact because the power of God sustained them. The rest of the world, you remember, bears a mark called the mark of the beast. That mark is in the foreheads or the hands of all those who reject the gospel and worship the beast. But this triumphant group also is marked with the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father because they belong to Him, He is their protector. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord. This is the foremost matter of their protection. It again reminds us that God keeps His own.

Back to Philippians 1:6 which I have mentioned so many times to you, but it's such an important Scripture. There Paul says, "I am confident of this very thing that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." God has the keeping power. It reminds me also of Jude in that wonderful testimony at the end of Jude which says, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy." And the words of our Lord in John 6, that He would lose none who belonged to Him. And in John 10, "No one is able to pluck them out of His hand, His Father is greater than all." And all of those testimonies to God's keeping power come into play in triumphant Christianity. If we triumph, if we stand blameless in the end, if we are victorious, if we are overcomers, we can credit the power of God who is able to keep us from falling. And we looked into that last time.

Let's go to a second point tonight, and work our way through these. There is a second characteristic of triumphant saints. Characteristic number one is power, they experience the power of God. Number two is praise...praise. You'll notice how praise comes from them, very, very quickly in the scene. Verse 2, "I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters, like the sound of loud thunder and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps and they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders and no one could learn the song except a hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth."

Here we see that immediately when the hundred and forty-four thousand are on the mountain with the Lamb, they begin to join in the heavenly song of redemption. With all the devastation, with all the trouble, with all the rejection, all the hostility, the hatred and the animosity they've had to endure, you might think they might be a bit on the haggard side, a bit on the sorrowful side like Israel in captivity in Babylon, it says, of course, in Psalm 137 that they hung their harps on the willow trees because there was nothing to sing about. But not this group. They praise the Lord with joy for their protection and their triumph. And they are actually joining in to a heavenly chorus. Let's follow it starting in verse 2, "I heard a voice from heaven." Now that is not something new to the reader of the book of Revelation, that occurs numerous times. We find it back in chapter 10 a couple of times, chapter 14 and also in chapter 18. A familiar thing to hear a voice from heaven. And it tells us the voice was like the sound of many waters. You remember that I described to you in the past that that is to indicate that it was loud, it was continuous, it was very loud. And he adds to let us know that's what he's saying, "Like the voice, or the sound, of loud thunder." Now that description may fit chapter 1 and verse 15 where the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ is described as a voice like the sound of many waters, it could well be the voice of God but I think it's even more than that. The voice of God and all the hosts of heaven singing God's glorious praise for redemption. I think that's the song of redemption.

We ask, "Who in heaven is doing this? Who in heaven would be singing this?" Chapter 5, chapter 5 and verse 8, here we meet twenty-four elders. We have endeavored through this study of Revelation to point out that they are most likely representatives of the church. They would be symbolic of those saints who are in the presence of the Lord from the church. They fall down before the Lamb, they have harps and bowls full of incense and they sang a new song. Here's their song, "Worthy art Thou to take the book and break its seals for Thou wast slain and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation and Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God and they will reign upon the earth. And then he looks and the voice of many angels around the throne, and the living creatures and elders, and the number is myriads of myriads, thousands upon thousands and tens of thousands times tens of thousands. And they're all saying, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.' And then every created thing in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them again says to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, 'Be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.'"

And so this escalating chorus goes. Over in chapter 7 we see those who were saved out of the Tribulation added to it. In verse 10 they cry out with a loud voice, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb and all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.'" And this is all of the great tribute of heaven to the God of redemption,

thunderous praise coming out of heaven.

And John hears this thunderous heavenly praise. And then he also adds, "The voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps." Now this great voice takes on a musical tone. Here we find musical instruments. We don't find them in Revelation chapter 4 in the praise, or in Revelation chapter 5 in the praise, or as I just read you in Revelation chapter 7, but now all of a sudden, music. Somebody has suggested that there was music before the Fall and there won't be music until the Lord Jesus returns and removes the curse and sets up His Kingdom. Maybe this is when the music starts again. The harpists playing on their harps. This is not thunderous judgment, that mitigates the tone of it all, the harps, this is thunderous joy because the Lamb has returned and is standing victorious.

Harpes are mentioned, by the way, about forty times in the Old Testament and they are associated with joy. As I noted earlier, when the Israelites in Babylon had no joy, they hung their harps on the willow trees and didn't play them. Here at the glorious return of Jesus Christ to earth to set up His kingdom from Zion, all heaven bursts into the music of praise. And there is a marvelous time of praise.

By the way, back in chapter 5 verse 8, it does say that the twenty-four elders had a harp. And it may be that this is the same harping from the twenty-four elders in heaven. And as I suggested to you, however, it seems to be a louder and more forceful and dominant kind of harping here, the sound of harpists playing on their harps, that may be...I don't want to overstate the case, it may be simply a reference back to the twenty-four elders playing their harps. But here we do know this, the Lamb has come to the throne, He stands on the mount and heaven bursts into the praise and the music that they've been waiting to offer to the Lamb for a long, long time and it's so grand and so great that it finds its way all the way to Mount Zion.

Look at verse 3, it tells us the nature of the song. "They sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth." Nobody could sing the song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. Why?

Well, let's work our way through this and see if we can't answer the question. I don't think it's intending to be too complicated. We know this, heaven can rejoice over redemption. Angels can rejoice over someone else's redemption. How do we know that? Because in Luke chapter 15 we have three illustrations of that. Back in Luke 15 which is a familiar passage of Scripture, you have in that chapter the very familiar story of the prodigal son. But you have a couple of other stories that our Lord tells. The first is about a man who loses one of his sheep, brings it home, says to his friends and neighbors, "Rejoice with me." And then it says there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons. Then a lady lost a coin. She found it. She

calls her friends and neighbors again. And in the same way she calls them together to rejoice and the Lord says there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. And then the story of the prodigal. The whole celebration is meant to be a celebration of God and the holy angels.

It is not to say that holy angels cannot rejoice in redemption. They can't experience it but they can certainly rejoice in it.

Here is heaven overflowing again, not over one sinner who repents but over the fact that the whole redemptive work up until the return of Christ is accomplished. The church is certainly leading out in the song of redemption, the elders are playing their harps. The Tribulation saints are singing their new song of redemption, as chapter 7 verses 9 and 10, all of the redeemed can sing the song of redemption first hand. And by the way, the song of redemption is first mentioned back in the Psalms. In Psalm 33, "Sing for joy in the Lord, O you righteous ones, praise is becoming to the upright. Give thanks so the Lord with the lyre, sing praises to Him with the harp of ten strings, sing to Him a new song, play skillfully with the shout of joy." And the new song is always the song of redemption, the song of salvation. You find that new song in numerous psalms. Psalm 40 verse 3, "Has put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God." Much later in the Psalms, in Psalm 96 I think it's verse 1, just be sure about that, similarly it says, "Sing to the Lord...yes...a new song, sing to the Lord all the earth." Psalm 144, Psalm 149. So the new song in the Old Testament Psalms was the song of redemption, the song of a soul made new. And so they sang, it says, a new song. Not just the twenty-four elders. Certainly the twenty-four elders, of course, they were singing it. But it isn't limited to them. They sang a new song before the throne, probably refers to the redeemed, the "they." But the four living creatures are there, the elders as well. So the scene is just a conglomeration, very hard to sort it out. Some people get kind of picky here, trying to pick and choose exactly who's doing what. But I think the best thing to understand is you have all of the heavenly voices joining in on the new song. Some who have personally experienced redemption, that is saints and some who are rejoicing in God's glorious redemption, namely angels. All the redeemed around the throne, they've waited for this moment, they've waited for the Lamb to stand on Zion and now the song begins to cascade over the walls of heaven and comes all the way down to earth.

And he says the only ones who can learn the song on the earth are the hundred and forty-four thousand who have been purchased from the earth. Only the redeemed, only those purchased by Christ's blood. Only those who have experienced redemption.

Henry Morris writes an interesting note about this. He says, "Although the words of the song of the hundred and forty-four thousand are not recorded, it surely dwells in part, at least, on the great truth that they had been redeemed from the earth, because that's what it says there. Although in one sense all saved people have been redeemed from the earth, these could know the meaning of such a theme in a more profound way than others. They had been saved after the Rapture, at that time in

history when man's greatest persecutions and God's greatest judgments were on the earth. It was such a time that they like Noah had found grace in the eyes of the Lord and had been separated from all that dwell on the earth. Not only had they been redeemed spiritually, but precursively, as it were, they had been redeemed from the very curse on the earth, being protected from pain and death by the guarding seal."

So it says there in verse 3 no one could learn the song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. Now there's a technical problem there, what about the rest of the living saints who are going to go into the kingdom, Jews and Gentiles who weren't among those...those hundred and forty-four thousand, could they also learn the song? Well it's not necessary to exclude those others. I don't think the intention here is to say that only the hundred and forty-four thousand could learn the song and not any other believer, but rather any other unbeliever. It's somewhat of a difficulty.

The point is this, heaven is singing about God's redemption. Now here are the hundred and forty-four thousand standing on the mountain, exuberant with joy, they have come through all of this. They have literally been redeemed from the earth, that is spared from the judgment. And they are there to sing the new song. Some of that song, by the way, is given in chapter 15. It says in verse 3, "They sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb," and here's part of it, "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God the Almighty, righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations, who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name, for Thou alone art holy, for all the nations will come and worship before Thee for Thy righteous acts have been revealed." And they encompass the song of Moses in with the song of the Lamb, it's all about God's majesty, God's power, God's redemption and God's kingdom.

Now again, this is a somewhat difficult passage to try to dissect every little piece. And I don't know that the Spirit of God expects us to be able to comprehend that. We do know that all of heaven is cascading with a song of praise to the redeeming God and the hundred and forty-four thousand now join that and it's not really a song that anyone can sing except those who have been redeemed, those who have been purchased from the earth. And it may well be that it's only the hundred and forty-four thousand, as I said earlier and read from Morris, because they were the ones uniquely purchased because they were delivered through all of the time of Tribulation when they were the target for deadly destruction by the Antichrist and his empire.

Now, praise then and power mark those who are triumphant. And I'll just extrapolate off of this for a moment, if I can. I'm trying to hurry a little bit to get through this. To extrapolate a little off of that and say this, the principle I want you to draw from this is one that is really not explicit but implicit. If we are to be triumphant believers, if we are to have the kind of character and the kind of staying power, the kind of triumphant experience that the hundred and forty-four thousand will have, in just a small way, I think it must be through the power of God that we do that and we must do it with hearts that are

filled with praise. I really believe triumphant Christians are Christians who praise God, whose hearts are immediately ready to burst forth in praise when God shows Himself powerful. And I would venture to say that these hundred and forty-four thousand have experienced a praising heart through all of the time of their trials because that's the nature of triumphant believers.

Now let's look at a third principle, and that is the principle of purity. And this is kind of getting us now into the heart of it. I want to bring you to verse 4 and 5 because I think that's what's most helpful to us.

The third component here is purity. And you see it at the beginning of verse 4. "These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste."

The religion of the beast, the worship of Antichrist I really believe will be a retrogression, I guess you could call it a retrogression, or maybe not because it's perhaps common even today, to times when religion was sensual, when religion was sexual, when religion was perverse, when religion pandered to every evil lust. Like the fertility cults of old, like the prostitutes who supposedly could buy prostitution and sexual involvement with an individual draw them to the deity himself, I believe in Antichrist's world sexual sin will run rampant. Certainly with the restraints off, with the furious judgment of God on and God abandoning society to its sins, it will be a gross and immoral and evil time. If you think it's bad now, you can't even conceive of what the onslaught of deviation sexually might be like in that period of time. But these hundred and forty-four thousand who triumphant, have not been defiled with women.

They provide an illustration for us, nothing more. They are an illustration of God's keeping power. They are an illustration of praise in the midst of tremendous difficulty. And they are an illustration of purity. They will not defile themselves with women. Now that is the reason we know they are men. And that's just a good reminder that God has designed that men represent Him as the proclaimers of His truth. These men will not be defiled. The word for defilement simply means to soil or to stain or to desecrate. The phrase "with women" leads to the conclusions that the issue here is sexual purity. And that's going to be some remarkable kind of behavior given the world of that day.

Frankly, it's pretty remarkable behavior even in the world of today, isn't it? If you tried to find a hundred and forty-four thousand pastors today who hadn't defiled themselves with women, you might have to look for a long time. A hundred and forty-four thousand, twelve thousand out of every tribe who have not defiled themselves with women. Some people have made this a more general sort of idea that it means they will detach themselves from the corrupt system. That's possible as a meaning. But I think the idea here is simply stated as sexual purity because it's repeated, they have kept themselves chaste. Obviously they will not be corrupted by the system, that kind of goes along with it all. Obviously they're not going to be polluted by the Antichrist's satanic system.

But beyond that, they will not even be defiled in the sexual area. Surely they're not going to have intercourse with the Antichrist's system. That's obvious. They've already, like many other believers, denied the mark of the beast. Of course they're not going to engage in intercourse with the Antichrist system, but I think they're going to go beyond that, and they're going to be pure. Some have suggested that this means there are a hundred and forty-four thousand single men who have never been married. Sex within marriage doesn't defile anybody. Hebrews is very clear, isn't it, in chapter 13, the bed is undefiled. But what it means is there are a hundred and forty-four thousand morally pure preachers without the moral defilement of the culture around them, they will stand apart. It literally says they're parthenoi, they're chaste. They have resisted the seduction of harlots as well as the harlot system. And they've maintained purity.

God has tremendous, tremendous plans for these men, triumphant men. And I really believe that the standard for us is the same. If one is to be a triumphant Christian, they must experience the keeping power of God. They must live a life of praise no matter how difficult it is and they must maintain purity. Whenever I hear of someone in the ministry who falls into sin and impurity and in so doing say...Well, you know, it's very difficult in this culture, we have to be understanding. I want to think about the hundred and forty-four thousand who living in the middle of Satan's empire will not fall. You can imagine what a force they'll be, can't you?

A fourth point about being a victor here, power, praise, purity, partisanship. It's hard to find that word with a "p" by the way. Partisanship, verse 4, "These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes." These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They're partisans, to the party of the Lamb. They're the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

The Oxford Dictionary defines "partisan" this way, an adherent, a supporter, one who supports his cause through thick and thin, a blind unreasoning prejudicial and fanatical adherent. That is them. They are partisans. Partisanship, says the dictionary, is the practice of being completely loyal. These triumphant one hundred and forty-four thousand are partisans, at any cost they are loyal to the Lamb. They allow no rivals, no refusals, no restraint to mar their dedication to Him. Does He need somebody to stand on the steps of the Vatican and cry out against the marriage of Christendom to the beast? They'll do it. Does the Lord need somebody to...to confront the Antichrist himself or the false prophet or any of his henchmen at any function and roundly denounce him and denounce his policy and denounce his witchcraft? They'll do it. Does the Lamb need an evangelist to go to the corners of the world and proclaim the gospel? They'll do it. To climb the highest mountain, to cross the desert sands, to blaze evangelistic trails through steaming jungles? They'll do it. It doesn't matter what the beast does. It doesn't matter how he goes after them. It doesn't matter how he sends his forces to kill them. None of it matters. They are undaunted. They are undeterred. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Devotion.

And that kind of partisanship is exactly what Jesus asks us to do. I heard it twice in the testimonies in baptism tonight that people said, "I want to obey whatever the Lord asks me to do." I mean, that's just basic. You find that all throughout the New Testament Scriptures. I don't need to beg the issue, it's repeated over and over again. You heard it from the gospel of John in chapter 15...or chapter 14 verse 15, "If you love Me you'll keep My commandments." It's just common knowledge to any Christian.

Jesus said to His disciples, "If you want to be My disciple, take up your cross and follow Me." He said to the rich young ruler, "Come follow Me." He said to the Apostle Peter after his reinstatement in the end of the gospel of John, "Follow Me." Same thing He had said at the very beginning, He had to say it years later because of Peter's wavering. Paul even said, "Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ." This makes for real winners who will follow the Lord at any price, at any cost no matter what it means. And in John 21, Jesus said to Peter, "Somebody is going to take you where you don't want to go, and somebody is going to tie you up and bind you and you're going to lose your life for My sake." And Peter's question was immediately, "Well what's going to happen to John?" And Jesus said, "That's none of your business, you follow Me." The winner, the one who triumphs, and Peter eventually did, the one who is standing when the smoke clears is the one who is so partisan to the Lord Jesus Christ that nothing deters.

And then a fifth thought here that certainly illustrates what is necessary to be a winner in the spiritual life, purpose...purpose. This is marvelous. "These have been purchased from among men as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb." They have been purchased. There's that redemptive language again, bought with a price. First Peter 1, "Bought with a price not of silver and gold but of the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without spot and without blemish." They were redeemed. But notice this, they were redeemed, purchased out from among men as firstfruits to God.

Now what is firstfruits? Well if you go back in the Old Testament you find that firstfruits is just a term for offerings. When you grew a crop, when the crop was harvested, you took the firstfruits that came in, the first part harvested, and gave it to God as an offering, consecrated, devoted to the service of God. And what he is saying is these people are like firstfruits offerings. They are given to God in special dedication. All the rest of it should be used to the honor of God, all of us should be used to the honor of God, all of us should serve God. But some of us are unique in our service rendered. Some of us are consecrated uniquely and especially to divine duty. And I think that's the intent here. First of all, that's the primary intent that they are set apart. You can go back into the Old Testament and you can read about how God designed that the firstfruits be set apart unto Him as a special sacrifice and a special offering. Deuteronomy chapter 26, I won't take the time to read it but you can read it in the first eleven verses there.

And I think he sees the hundred and forty-four thousand as a special group of men out from all the rest of saved people, offered to God for unique service. Not like all the rest. After all, there were only a hundred and forty-four thousand of them. Not everybody fit into that at all.

So as those who had been given to God in the unique way, they're like an offering. They're like a special sacrifice, dedicated to God and offered to Him for divine service. This is not just a normal group of folks, but a group offered in special consecrated service to the Lamb. That's the purpose of their life. They have one purpose for their life. They will serve the Lord, they will proclaim the gospel out of a pure life to a perishing and hating world. That kind of focus and that kind of purpose, that kind of decisiveness, that kind of clarity of life goal, I think, is so much the part of one who is to be a winner. Now you may not be selected for that special service, but the pattern is still the same. Whatever level of service you render to God should so consume you that it becomes your life purpose and nothing can deter you from it. The thing that keeps you going, the thing that keeps you from falling into sin, the sin that keeps you disciplined and moving toward your goal is the fact that you know that this is why you live and breathe. And that's true of all of us, not just the specially called like the hundred and forty-four thousand. So they illustrate a certain level of devotion and dedication to us that may be helpful in helping us to look at what makes people winners.

Now there's one other possible note here, and again this chapter has so many options. It's...I haven't shared them all with you because you can't be profited by going in to every conceivable option, but there's a lot of very sort of challenging issues in interpreting this. Some would suggest this, and I'll give it to you because you may want to think it through, that the idea of firstfruits is not so much just the offering, but the idea of representation. Representation in this sense, the firstfruits given to God were indication that there was more to follow. Sometimes the idea of firstfruits has that. For example, 1 Corinthians chapter 16, I'll give you an illustration of that in verse 15, "I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanos that they were the firstfruits of Achaia." Now what he means there, most likely, is that they were the first people converted in Achaia but there would be more to come. The firstfruits being representative of more to come. Some similar note, I think it's found at the end of the book of Romans. Yes, it talks about Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the firstfruits, or the first convert to Christ from Asia. Now there would be then more to follow.

And some would suggest to us then that the hundred and forty-four thousand are the firstfruits of Israel. They're there and that's only a beginning indication of the redemption of all of Israel. The problem with that particular viewpoint is that the redeemed Israel would have already been redeemed by this time, but then you could argue the hundred and forty-four thousand had been redeemed a lot earlier before they were sealed, and at that time they were the firstfruits of what would come. And that may be legitimate.

In either case, whether you see them purely as the firstfruits because they are uniquely devoted to God, or the firstfruits because they are an indication of what is to follow, it is very clear that the heart

of their life was one thing, one purpose, and that was to toil on behalf of the living Lord no matter what the cost. They were winners because they had purpose. They lived for one great consuming purpose. They were given to God for service. They were given to the Lamb to preach His gospel.

To add another "p" to our little list, and you are definitely getting the abridged version tonight, to add another "p" to our list, precision...precision. Verse 5 says, "No lie was found in their mouth." That is to say they were precise. There was precision in what they said. There was no sloppiness, there was no exaggeration, there was no overstatement, there was no understatement, they spoke precisely God's truth.

Now there's an interesting Old Testament verse that ties in with this, Zephaniah 3:13, looking ahead at the time of Israel's restoration it says this, "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies, nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths." There the prophet Zephaniah saw the very same thing, that there would be a great group of Jews in the end who would be known for their precision in speaking the truth of God. They will never fall over into lies, certainly it means they will never propagate Satan's lie, obviously. The whole world will be head deep in lies and head deep in deception. Second Thessalonians 2 verses 9 to 11 where we have gone numbers of times points that out, the whole world will be deceived with lying wonders, but these men will not. They will speak the truth. They will speak precisely the Word of God. They will be accurate, appropriate without wavering, without equivocating, or without altering the Word of God. That's another mark on their lives that makes them triumphant. And certainly that's a wonderful example to us. The Bible is repeatedly warning us about lies and about our conversation.

And there's one last point, and I'll close with this. Let's call it perfection...let's call it perfection. They triumphed because of power, praise, purity, partisanship, purpose, precision, perfection. This is amazing. They're blameless.

I read one writer this week, among many, who suggested that they are sinless. I mentioned to you last Sunday night that some among the Seventh Day Adventists have suggested that it will be sinless people. There's no reason to assume that because there's nobody who can be sinless. If they're people, they're not sinless. And they are people, they're twelve thousand Jews out of every tribe and if they are human beings, and they are, they cannot be sinless. But they are sanctified. And when it says they are blameless, it is the kind of blamelessness that the Apostle Paul affirmed that he had even before he was a Christian when he says in Philippians 3, "According to the law, blameless." In other words, they will have such impeccable reputations that there is nothing in their lives of a sin for which they could be held culpable and responsible publicly. Not sinless, but sanctified...living holy lives, godly lives.

You know, when we were saved it was because God wanted us to be holy and blameless before Him, so says Ephesians chapter 1. We were saved to be holy. Peter told us, "Be holy, even as your

Father in heaven is holy." The Lord wants to present to Himself as a bride a church that is without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that is holy and blameless. Paul said to the Corinthians, he wanted to present them to Christ as a chaste virgin. It's talking about sanctification. It's talking about the perfection of holiness, not absolute, ultimate and complete sinlessness, but maturity, virtue, godliness. All Scripture is inspired by God, says Paul to Timothy, profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect. What kind of perfect does he mean? Mature, blameless. They'll not be sinless. But they'll be sanctified, godly, Christlike men. And they stand triumphant.

You know, they're really not the only people who have ever lived like that. There were some other conquerors. Listen to Hebrews 11. "What more shall I say...verse 32...about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight." There have been some triumphant believers through the centuries. These men are the most unique of all.

What I've tried to do and I hope it's been a little bit successful, is to see this as more than just a prophetic scenario, but to recognize that these are actually human beings and that they came by God's grace and His power and His plan to a place in their lives where they could triumph over the most wicked, vile, culture in the history of the world because they called on God's power, they were filled with God's praise, they pursued purity, they were partisans to Jesus Christ their divine leader, they live for one purpose, to sacrifice their lives as an offering to God. They were precise in always speaking the truth. And they grew to spiritual maturity. What exemplary men they are. And I believe they provide for us a most unique and a most interesting pattern for what being...what is really...what it is like, I should say, to be a spiritual super-conqueror or overcomer.

In conclusion I'll say this. No wonder they bring the world's greatest spiritual awakening. I believe that the indication of chapter 7 verses 9 to 12 is that during the Tribulation time under the ministry of these men there will be the greatest revival the world has ever known. No wonder the force and the power of their lives is unequalled in all of human history. And I hope they can serve, though they are so unique, as a model for all of us to enter into the triumph that is really ours in Christ if we choose to follow their path.

Father, we thank You for tonight. It's been a wonderful service. We thank You for the testimonies and the music. We thank You for the fellowship we've enjoyed. And, Father, there's so much in this text that is prophetic and future and distant and it has a certain fascination and it speaks to us of Your great power. But, Lord, we want to make it practical, too. These are people and what gave them triumph and what gave them victory and what caused them to stand when the smoke cleared and still

they were in the presence of the Lamb was the fact that they followed a path of victory that's been laid out for all of us. Help us to walk in it, to experience in some way the kind of triumph that will belong to them. Help us, Lord, to be able to sing the song of redemption maybe just a little bit like they sing it because we know what it is to live against the grain of the culture and to see Your power delivering us from it. Help us, Lord, to see ourselves as offerings to You with the purpose of proclaiming Your truth. And though we may not be called as preachers, we certainly are called to be living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto You which is our act of spiritual worship.

I pray in this generation, Lord, if it can't be a hundred and forty-four thousand, please could it be some who would be faithful, who would not be defiled with women but chaste, who would follow the Lamb wherever He leads, who would be willing to speak only the truth and never lies.

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