

A Cloud, A Crown, & A Sickle – Rev. 14:14-16

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Letter Opener*

1. This is a letter opener – I carved it a few weeks ago while sitting on a large bolder above East lake in the Sierra.
2. I started with a stick covered with bark and the nubs of broken twigs that had at one time come out of it.
3. I stripped off the bark, whittled down the nubs, and then started fashioning it into a letter opener.
4. My tools in carving were a sheath knife and a pocket knife.
 - a. on every backpacking trip I do some carving,
 - b. if the knife is dull, it can't carve –
 - c. so prior to every trip, I get out the whetstone and go to work.
 - d. a sharp knife allows me to make something like this – a letter opener that has its own sharp edge.

B. *Staying Sharp*

1. What's true for a knife is true for our *spiritual* lives – we must stay *sharp*!
2. To be effective, we must resist the *dullness* that comes from daily contact with a sinful world.
3. If we would live successfully, we must make contact with the whetstone of God's Word which will renew our edge,
4. Our text today does just that!

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 14-16*

14Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat *One* like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.

15And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."

16 So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

1. John is seeing a kind of summary vision of the final judgment.
2. Later chapters will fill in the details, but here the focus is on the *agent* of Judgment – Jesus Christ.
3. It's v. 14 I want to concentrate on this morning; look here with me.
4. John says,

Then I looked, and behold . . .

- a. it's easy for us to see these first words as merely a typical religious introduction for what follows
 - b. but John is not just trying to be eloquent and poetic here – he means this sincerely.
 - c. when he says, “Behold” he means for us to “see” this.
 - d. he knows we cannot see it in the same fashion he did – as a vision that appeared in his actual sight –
 - e. but by *describing* it, he means for us to *see* it with our *spiritual* senses.
5. Let me illustrate: (And please try to picture this, for a reason that will soon become clear)
- a. I began this morning by talking about my Sierra trip
 - b. I ask you now to try to picture that setting.
 - c. I am sitting on a white granite boulder that is about 30 by 20 feet, and a good 4 feet high.
 - d. the ground around the boulder is a meadow, which short green grass and tiny white & yellow flowers.
 - e. tall pine and Sequoias trees are standing all around.
 - f. a cliff face rise behind me up about 2500 ft. while in front of me the ground gradually slopes away about 50 yards to a creek winding through the meadow.
 - g. on the other side of the creek, the ground again rises into another mountain ridge that towers 2000 ft. over the little valley we're camped in.
 - h. it's about 11 am and the sun is out, heating the air to the mid 80's. One single massive fluffy white cloud hangs in an otherwise perfectly deep blue sky.
 - i. there is really no breeze to speak of, the air is still and you can hear the insects bussing and an occasional bird chirping in a

- tree.
- j. just on the edge of hearing is the sound of the water in the creek as it cascades over the boulders in it's bed.
 - k. I'm sitting cross-legged on that granite boulder, and carving this letter opener with my knife – thinking to myself > can it get any better than this?
6. Even though you weren't there, my description of it can help you "see" it for yourself; **IF**, and here's the important part, you ACTIVELY engaged in listening and seeing it!
 7. Notice that I began my description by asking you to do that very thing – to listen and see with your imagination.
 8. Well, that is precisely what John does at the outset of v. 14.
 - a. he saw something, he was really there and was given an actual vision that filled his sight.
 - b. he knows his readers cannot see that vision in the same way he did, and yet he urges them to listen to his description of what he saw so they might "see" it as well –
 - c. not with their physical eyes but with their spiritual eyes – so they might *see* it by *faith*.

Then I looked, and behold . . .

B. What John Saw

1. Now John tells us what he saw – and what he saw, we're to see as well -

A white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.

2. John saw "One like the Son of Man"
 - a. the title "Son of Man" was Jesus's favorite designation for Himself.
 - 1) when He spoke of Himself in the third person, this is the title he used most often.
 - 2) you see, as the disciples lived with and followed Him, it was easy for them to come to see Jesus as so radically different from themselves and everyone else they had ever met.
 - 3) while Jesus *looked* like a man – he sure didn't *act* like any man they had every known

- 4) and the things He said and miracles He performed combined to make them see Him as more than human, which of course he was.
- 5) so Jesus constantly referred to Himself as the *Son of Man* to remind them that He was indeed a man!
 - a) while they kept wanting to elevate Him to something *distant*
 - b) He kept moving toward them to reveal His intimate concern and love and to remind them that He shared their humanity.
- b. but there was another reason why Jesus chose the title “Son of Man.”
 - 1) there as a well known passage in Daniel 7 that referred to the Messiah as the *Son of Man*
 - 2) by applying this title to Himself, He was revealing Himself as their long-hoped for Messiah.
- c. there’s one final reason why John uses that title *here* – in *this* setting.
- d. it has to do with something we find in John 5:26-27; Jesus said
...

As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man."

- e. this vision in Rev. 14 is a vision of the final judgment, the very thing Jesus was referring to in John 5 – where He refers to Himself as the “Son of Man.”
- f. so John says, “I saw One like the Son of Man.”
3. Note the subtle change – John didn’t say he saw the Son of Man, but one **LIKE** the Son of Man.
 - a. it’s the same Person – it’s *Jesus* John saw
 - b. but somehow His *visage*, His *appearance* has *changed*
 - c. it’s not hard to see how it’s changed from John’s perspective!
 - d. you see, John was accustomed to seeing Jesus in His *humility*; in His earthly mission where His glory was *veiled* and He came without fanfare and acclaim.
 - e. John had followed Jesus for over 3 years and had come to know

- Him probably better than any other of the other disciples
- f. he was close to Jesus and knew what the Lord *looked like*.
 - h. but what John was so intimately familiar with was the Son of Man in His humility.
 - i. as Paul describes it in Philippians 2 – Jesus humbled himself, emptied Himself of His heavenly glory and wrapped Himself in the frailty of human flesh.
 - 1) then coming as a man, He did not take some station or office of authority among men
 - 2) instead, He took the *lowest* place, and became a servant
 - 3) and knowing the service men and women needed was redemption from sin, He chose the path of ultimate humiliation and went to the Cross!
 - j. that's the Son of Man John knew so well
 - k. the Son of Man he sees here in Rev. 14 is like that – but something fundamental in His appearance has changed!
 - l. all the marks of the former humiliation are now erased.
 - m. the glory that Jesus had laid aside has now be taken back up
4. John identifies three things that reveal the glory of the Son of Man
5. First off is a *cloud* -

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat *One* like the Son of Man.

- a. this is far more than just a puffy white cloud in the sky.
- b. this cloud is the *visible manifestation of glory* that attends the presence of God.
- c. frequently in scripture, when God shows up on earth, there's a thick cloud that surrounds Him.
- d. it's a cloud of light – a visible manifestation of His glory known as the Shekinah
- e. it's what led Israel through the wilderness in the Exodus
- f. it descended on Mt. Sinai when the law was given
- g. it's what filled the temple and stood atop the ark of the covenant
- h. it surrounded Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration
- i. and it's what Jesus ascended into *from* the top of the Mt. of Olives.
- j. an angel then appeared to the disciples as they stood there with their mouths hanging open and told them when Jesus came

- again, He would come in the same manner that He had left –
He will come in a cloud – the cloud of God’s glory!
- k. in Luke 21, speaking of His return, Jesus said -

27 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

- l. John is being given a fore-glimpse of that here in Rev. 14
6. Second, John sees Jesus with a *crown* -

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.

- a. the word for crown here is the word *stephanos* and refers to the *victor’s* crown.
- b. this isn’t the royal crown or diadem of a king;
- c. this is the circlet worn by the victorious athlete or the reward given to the conquering general who returns home victorious in battle.
- d. but note something about this victor’s crown – it’s made of *gold*.
- e. the *stephanos* worn by the ancient athlete was made of *leaves* – it was a simple garland of *green laurel* – which not long after his victory lap would wither and fade.
- f. you see, the ancients wanted to remind their athletes that youth was fleeting and their strength would soon fail, just as their crown quickly faded.
- g. the victorious general needed to be reminded that his victory could be quickly overturned by a stronger power – the fading leaves of the *stephanos* reminded him.
- h. but the victor’s crown Jesus wears here is made of gold –
1) and though the *stephanos* was not a royal crown
2) gold is the *royal* metal that does not fade.
- i. in this one image, John sees both the victory and the royalty of Jesus!
- j. He’s not merely some king who’s gained His throne by heredity
- k. Jesus has *earned* His throne – He’s the Conquering King who’s won His kingdom in battle!
- l. He’s the Son of Man who’s reclaimed the throne of earth given

to Adam but forfeited to satan in the Fall.

- m. Colossians 2:15 says that Jesus has triumphed over the hosts of hell, stripped them of their power, and then as a Conquering King, ridden at the head of a victory parade in which they follow behind as the trophies of his victory!

7. Third, Johns sees a *sickle* -

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat *One* like the Son of Man having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.

- a. the word refers to a tool used to reap grain.
- b. it's not much different from this really (letter opener) except the blade was curved with the sharpened edge back towards the handle.
- c. as it's swung, the outer edge of the scoop gathers the stalks of grain into a bundle and moves them toward the sharp edge, which cuts them off.
- d. a sickle is a tool of harvest – and as vs. 15 & 16 reveal, this is a harvest of the evil of the earth at the end of time.
- e. in Matthew 13 Jesus told the parable of the wheat and the tares.
 - 1) a farmer went out and sowed good seed in his field
 - 2) but during the night an enemy sowed weeds.
 - 3) as the season progressed and the plants grew, the servants told the land-owner that the tares and good seed were growing together.
 - 4) they asked if they should uproot the weeds, but the farmer said “No! Let them go.”
 - 5) then, when it was time for harvest, the difference between the wheat and the weeds was even more clear.
 - 6) the wheat was gathered into the farmer's barn while the weeds were cut down and burned in heaps.
- f. the sickle in the hand of Jesus is a symbol of His authority to judge sin.
- g. He has the right and authority to judge because as the Son of Man, He's the One Who also makes *the way of escape* from that judgment through the Cross.

C. The Contrast

1. And that's the picture John sees here – that's what He wants you and I to see!
2. What John sees in v. 14 stands in *sharp contrast* to what he'd seen in the 3 years he'd spent with Jesus during His earthly ministry.
3. Here John sees Jesus coming on a cloud of glory – The first time Jesus came, He came in *obscurity*.
 - a. He came in a virgin's womb
 - b. He came in a manger, a feeding trough
 - c. even in the Triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He came on a humble donkey-colt.
4. Here John sees Jesus coming with a *golden victory crown* – the first time He came, the only crown He wore was made of thorns.
 - a. those thorns representing the curse of sin placed on creation because of the Fall.
 - b. how fitting – God said that because of Adam's sin, the ground would yield thorns.
 - c. thorns are nothing more than the stunted growth of plants which are under the curse,
 - d. instead of flowers and fruit, sin has twisted them into sharp points that inflict pain.
 - e. Jesus came to bear the curse and to pay the debt for our sins –
 - f. and in a fitting symbol of His bearing the curse, the soldiers weaved a crown of thorns, thinking only to inflict more shame and pain upon Him.
 - g. all they did was give graphic evidence to what the Lord was in fact doing; bearing the curse so earth might be set free.
 - h. but now John doesn't see a crown of thorns – He sees a crown of gold,
 - i. for Jesus has conquered sin, death, and the devil.
5. Yes, the first time Jesus came, He came quietly, like a stealthy commando who comes ashore at night into enemy territory.
 - a. He was a one man Hostage Rescue Team who infiltrated behind enemy lines
 - b. He successfully rescued mankind who'd been taken captive by the devil.
 - c. and then returned us safely to His Kingdom.
 - d. what John sees here is when Jesus comes at the head of an army in a full invasion of satan's kingdom.

e. John elaborates on this in Ch. 19 -

11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ¹⁵Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

6. Prior to these visions of Jesus in glory and coming to judge the earth, John was used to thinking of Jesus as the *Good Shepherd*.
 - a. in fact, it's in ch. 10 of his gospel we find that great passage in which Jesus refers to Himself as the *Good Shepherd*.
 - b. John was accustomed to thinking of Jesus with a *shepherd's staff* in His hand,
 - c. a symbol of *tender* and *consistent guidance*.
 - d. the Good Shepherd is the one Who lays down His life for His sheep.
 - e. it was in *that* context that Jesus said that He came to give *abundant* life.
 - f. but it's no *staff* John sees here – it's a *sharp sickle!*
7. Do you see the contrast in the first and second comings of Christ?
8. The first time He came in humble obscurity – When He comes again, He comes in glory and every eye will see Him.
9. The first time He came as a servant to die on the cross, crowned by thorns – when He comes again, He comes as the Conquering King wearing a Golden Crown.
10. The first time He came as the Good Shepherd to give His life for the sheep – When He comes again He comes with a sharp

sickle to *take* the lives of the rebel goats, those who refuse to honor Him.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Behold!

1. And notice again how John begins this vision -
Then I looked, and behold . . .
2. What John saw and describes here, you and I are supposed to see by faith this morning!
3. We don't see it as John saw it – but his description paints a picture for us we are told to “Behold!”
4. The Jesus who came in humility to die for our sins – has Risen from the dead and is coming again in glory!
5. The Jesus who bore the crown of thorns and endured the mocking of the Romans soldiers is our Conquering King who will lead us as a heavenly army in the final conquest of Planet Earth – Him we praise with every breath and with all we have and are!
6. Though the Lord is our Shepherd who comforts us with his rod and staff – He is also the Judge who will put in the sickle and reap.
7. *See* Jesus this morning as John saw Him here!
 - a. *see* Him in His glory!
 - b. *see* him in His royal victory!
 - c. *see* Him in His office as the Judge of all the Earth!

B. We Need This Vision

1. We need this vision just as John needed it.
2. In John's time, things were not going well for the people of God.
 - a. the hostility of both the Romans and the Jews against the Church was *fierce*.
 - b. Jewish believers had been booted out of the synagogues.
 - c. and Gentile Christians were being put to death for failing to worship Caesar.
3. John was wondering how the Early church could survive.
4. He was the last of the Apostles, and he knew the Church could desperately use him but here he was confined to a barren island.
5. Then he has this vision and he's reminded that the God of heaven is also the God of history.

6. Jesus, the Jesus he had known and loved and served would come again!
7. This vision filled John with peace and confidence.
 - a. remember it comes right after chs. 12 & 13 which show the explosion of evil that will take place in the last days.
 - b. this comes immediately after those hideous visions of the career of the antichrist and false prophet
 - c. God wanted John to know that was not the end of the story – far from it!
 - d. after seeing all that, John sees *this* – a vision of the *glory & victory & authority* of Christ.
8. We need this vision too.
9. As the time winds down to the last days and the stage is being set for all the terrible stuff we read about here in Revelation, we need to be reminded that Jesus will come in glory!
 - a. in this day when it seems the Church is once again with its back to the wall
 - b. when Christians are marginalized and persecuted
 - c. when evil seems to grow worse and worse
 - d. we need to keep our eyes fixed on Christ!

D. Faith

1. Hebrews 11:1 says -

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

- a. faith is spiritual sight!
 - b. faith is fixing within our soul a confidence in what God's Word reveals
2. Today – behold, see what John saw – See Jesus as your victorious champion who is coming in glory to set things right!
 3. I love the expression of Job's faith when he said, [19:25-27]

I know *that* my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth;

And [even if I die], this *I know*, that in my flesh I shall see God; I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold. How my heart yearns within [me for that day!]

4. We don't see Jesus with our physical eyes now – but know this = WE WILL!
5. Right now – we are to see Him by faith!
6. And that vision ought to be crystal clear – a sharp image that enables us to live effectively and successfully today.
7. When I was a young boy, one Christmas I caught my dad laying out presents under the tree.
 - a. it was very late on Christmas Eve and I had gotten out of bed to go to the bathroom.
 - b. the bathroom was at the top of the stairs and from there, I could see down into the living room.
 - c. there was my dad, sticking a whole pile of toys and presents under and around the tree.
 - d. now, I had just woken up so my eyes were pretty bleary but I knew what I was looking at
 - e. when I came out of the bathroom, I was very quiet and stood for just a moment to make sure I had seen what I had seen.
 - f. sure enough – that was my father and he was playing Santa.
 - g. he never wrapped the presents he put out on Christmas Eve – so I could see several toys I had asked for – oh I was excited!
 - h. but it was still Christmas Eve and I knew I could not have them till Christmas Morning
 - i. so I tiptoed back to my room and went to bed – excited at the joy that was soon to be mine.
8. I had seen those presents at a distance, and I knew they were mine; I just had to wait a few hours for them.
9. That's what *faith* is – it's seeing what's ours *at a distance* and living in the confidence that in God's perfect timing He will bestow it on us.
10. This vision of Jesus is for you!
11. One day your eyes *will* see this.
12. Today, *see it by faith* and live confidently in the knowledge that Jesus is coming again!
 - a. His victory is sure!
 - b. His judgment – all embracing.
13. End with that – with the Judgment of Christ!
 - a. the Father has committed all judgment to the Son.
 - b. what that means is Jesus is the standard, the critical issue that

- determines a person's eternal fate.
- c. the cross or the sickle – [choose.]