

THE TWO HARVESTS **(Rev. 14:14-20 May 4, 2003)**

Let me begin by exercising your imagination. I want you to picture in your mind the great mass of humanity. Every man, woman and child ever born – from Adam to the final child born before the return of Christ.

A great ocean of humanity.

How many will there finally be? 10 billion, 12 billion, 15 billion people? I don't know. But picture this enormous mass of humanity. Black and white, oriental and Indian. Old and young. Rich and poor. Men and women.

And now separate them into two groups. On the right – those who are saved. Those who bear the mark of the Lamb. Those who will spend eternity praising the Lamb in heaven.

On the left – those who are lost. Those who bear the mark of the beast. Those who will spend eternity suffering day and night without rest in hell.

Now I would like you to take out a piece of paper and a pen and write down two numbers.

Remembering that all men ever born fall into one of these two groups, I want you to put down the percentage of all humanity – the percentage of all mankind ever born who will rejoice in heaven.

Then next to it – put down the percentage of the lost. Those destined for a Christless eternity.

What fraction of mankind will be in heaven? What fraction of mankind will be in hell?

Now, I'm going to ask you to put your hands up with your thoughts on this question.

If you think that the percentage of all of those ever born who will see heaven is more than 20% – if you think that more than one in five people ever born will be in heaven – raise your hand. What about less than 10%. Less than one in ten born will be in heaven. Less than 5%. Less than 2%.

There is no right or wrong answer to this question.

But what we do know is this. Wide is the gate that leads to destruction and many find it. Narrow is the gate that leads to eternal life and few find it.

Look at your two numbers. The saved will be a small amount. What a tragedy.

Billions of souls – men and women who lived and breathed and laughed and sang – they will suffer eternity in hell.

I find that thought almost too difficult to speak of.

Two groups. Scripture calls them many things. Saved and lost. Sheep and goats. Wheat and tares. Those with the mark of the Lamb and those with the mark of the beast. The first harvest and the second harvest.

Today we look at a passage that outlines in brutal realities the fate of these two groups.

Today we will look at two harvests – the **grain** harvest – which deals with the gathering of the saved at the end of time and the **grape** harvest – which deals with the gathering and punishment of the lost at the end of time.

Our passage is found in Revelation 14. We are looking at a section that stretches from verse 6 through to verse 20.

This section began with three angels who are *heralds of judgment*. They proclaimed that judgment is:

- Certain
- Deserved
- Horrific

But then in verses 12 and 13 we saw that the wrath of God does not fall on everyone. These are the saved. Those who have not yielded to the seduction, the deception, the persecution and pressure of the beasts. They have stayed faithful to Christ unto the end.

But now this section ends with Christ and three angels who are *harvesters of judgment*.

This section is made up of two harvests. In verses 14 to 16 we have a **grain** harvest. And in verses 17 to 20 we have a **grape** harvest.

The question is – why two harvests?

Quite clearly the second harvest is the harvest of the lost. They are flung into the winepress of the wrath of God and trampled.

But what about the grain harvest?

Some have maintained that these harvests represent the same thing. Both are pictures of the judgment of the lost. We have two harvests to emphasise the certainty and completeness of the wrath of God.

But I do not think that is what is going on here.

The Scriptures consistently speak of a dual aspect of the harvest. The final harvest is consistently broken down into the harvest of the saved and the harvest of the lost.

Look with me at Matthew 3:11. John the Baptist says of Christ:

His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, **but** He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

At the harvest He gathers the wheat – the saved – into His barn and then He destroys the chaff – the lost.

This is further expounded on in Matthew 13:24-30 – the parable of the wheat and the tares:

Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.” ‘ “

Again – separate harvests – the wheat and the tares.

And in case we are unsure what this means, Jesus explains it for us a few verses later. Matthew 13:36-43:

Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” And He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

A harvest of the saved for eternal life and a harvest of the lost for damnation.

This is the background to our passage. Notice especially that while the grape harvest suffers the wrath of God – nothing like this is said of the wheat harvest.

We begin today at verse 14:

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand.

Undoubtedly this is Christ. In the Bible – only Christ is spoken of as one like a son of man.

In Revelation 1 – Christ is pictured in His exalted state and called one like a son of man.

He appears on the clouds a common picture of the return of Christ for His own.

He has a crown of gold upon His head. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And He bears a sharp sickle – the instrument by which He will harvest the saved.

This is Christ appearing to harvest His own from this world.

Verse 15:

And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

Here is the *first* of the *three harvesters of judgement*. An angel comes out of the temple – out of the presence of God. He bears a message from God the Father. He declares that the end has come and the time for harvest has arrived.

It is the end of the age. It is time – for redemption and judgement. For the books to be opened. For heaven and hell to be filled.

In fact throughout this book – announcing the end of the age is the task of angels.

Chapter 10 verse 6 – it is an angel who cries – there will be delay no longer.

Chapter 14 verse 7 – an angel declares – the hour of His judgment has come.

This angel announces that the time has come for Christ to harvest the saved. The day has come.

Verse 16:

Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Do you know what this is? This is the day when the sky is split open and Christ appears surrounded by His mighty angels – the last trump sounds and the dead in Christ rise and those who are alive are raptured.

This is the day every child of God longs for. This is the day the whole creation groans for.

Let me read a few verses. See if you can picture the majesty of the coming of Christ for His own.

Matthew 24:29-31:

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Revelation 1:7:

Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

Revelation 22:20:

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

This is the grain harvest.

Those who are faithful. Those who have persevered. Those who have longed to see Him will rejoice.

I don't know about you, but the day the Lord comes for me is the day I long for more than anything else. The end of sin. The end of rebellion. The end of struggle.

I long to see Him. I long to see this world bow to Him. I long to know Him. I long for Him.

And He will come for me.

But He not only comes in love for His own – He comes in judgment whereby the wrath of His justice pours forth.

This graphic image is pictured in the second harvest – the **grape** harvest.

It begins with the *second* of the *three harvesters of judgement*.

Verse 17:

And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle.

Here is another angel, who comes from the temple – from the presence of God. And like Christ – this angel bears a sickle with which to harvest.

But he comes for the grape harvest – the harvest of the lost.

And the time for him to harvest is announced by the *third* of the *three harvesters of judgement*.

Verse 18:

Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.”

This angel comes from the altar. If you think back to chapter 8, the altar is the place where the prayers of the saints for the holy name of God to be vindicated are collected.

It is from the altar that the trumpet sounds and the wrath of the Lord is poured out.

That this is judgment is seen by the fact that this angel has power over fire. As we saw in verse 10 – hell is a place of fire and pain.

And this angel comes from God with a message – the time for the judgement of the lost has arrived. It is time for the angel to harvest the lost.

Verses 19-20:

So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

This picture of people gathered as grapes, flung into a winepress and pulverised by God is found in the Old Testament.

Joel 3:13:

Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.
Come, tread, for the wine press is full;

The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.

Isaiah 63:3-4:

I have trodden the wine trough alone,
And from the peoples there was no man with Me.
I also trod them in My anger
And trampled them in My wrath;
And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments,
And I stained all My raiment.
For the day of vengeance was in My heart,
And My year of redemption has come.

Understand what this is picturing. In the ancient world, the grapes were harvested, pulled off their stems and thrown into a vat.

The vat contained an upper section. It had small holes in the floor for the juice to drain into a lower section.

Slaves or farm workers would remove their sandals and tramp in the vat. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Crushing the juice out of the grapes. And the juice would run out of the small holes in the bottom of the vat.

And more grapes would be thrown in.

But here, it is not grapes that are thrown in. It is people. And it is Christ Himself who tramples them until their bodies are pulverised and the blood flows out.

We know it is Christ because we are told so in Revelation 19:15.

At times I shake my head in wonder at those who deny that Jesus would have anything to do with hell. I know of those who deny that Jesus would send men and women to hell. Jesus is love – hell is hatred.

Here we find how wrong such a view is. Jesus not only speaks about hell more than anyone else in Scripture – Jesus Himself treads the winepress of the wrath of God that banishes men and women to hell. He crushes these rebels.

These are the rebels who have spurned Christ and turned their back on God. And now the holiness and justice of God are poured forth in the wrath of God.

Right now you and I read this and we are shocked. The thought of God destroying men and women shocks us. The thought of hell horrifies us.

As I said last week – part of me wishes hell were not real – but – when we reach eternity we will understand the glory of God and the sin of man and we will declare that God's holiness demands such justice.

It enhances the glory of God.

Notice that there are so many rebels that the vat cannot contain their blood. Their blood flows over the top of the wine press.

It flows outward for a distance of sixteen hundred stadia – nearly two hundred miles and it is as high as the bridle of a horse.

It rises to a great height over an enormous distance.

We are meant to imagine countless numbers of the lost hurled into a vast vat. Trampled and the blood gushing forth. But this cannot be literal. The amount of blood is too great.

Again – this is symbolic. Literally the text says that the blood flows for a distance of 1600 stadia.

1600 is $4 \times 4 \times 10 \times 10$. Four is a number used in this book to represent the entire earth. In chapter 7 we read about the four corners of the earth.

It shows that this judgment is complete it goes to every corner of the earth.

But the amount of blood is so obscene that it is meant to picture the ghastly reality of this harvest.

For millennia – the Lord has stayed His hand until every saint is called. Now His wrath flows upon the lost. The rebels, the scoffers, the ungodly.

This is a time of carnage as the wrath of God destroys the rebels.

Notice that this happens *outside* the city. As we saw in chapter 11 and as we will see further in chapters 21 and 22 – the city represents the redeemed – the saved – the saints.

These are the lost – those outside the city – outside the community of the saved.

And they are in hell. Eternal conscious torment – that never wanes or relents.

Two harvests – and every man, woman and child is in one or the other.

This is the most serious of subjects. Heaven and hell are realities.

Jonathan Edwards understood the gravity of hell. He said this:

The misery of hell is doubtless so dreadful, and eternity so vast, that if a person should have a clear apprehension of that misery as it is, it would be more than his feeble frame could bear.¹

But others seem to have no idea of the true horror of hell.

¹ Edwards, *Works*, 2:261.

Ted Turner once commented:

I'm looking forward to dying and going to hell because that's where I'm headed.

What a fool. He has no idea.

Nor does Rodney Howard-Browne who said this:

One night I was preaching on hell when suddenly laughter just hit the whole place. The more I told people what hell was like, the more they laughed.²

Hell is no laughing matter. Nor is it a place any sane man would say – I am looking forward to it.

It is the place where the wrath of God is vented upon sinners.

Hell is not something you take lightly.

This whole book relentlessly asks the question – do you belong to the Lamb or the beast? Are you headed to heaven or hell? And it leaves you with no doubt – hell is a place you don't want to be.

Are you persevering, are you avoiding seduction and deception are you His?

But there is another question that is implied by this passage.

The passage we have just read deals with the end times – the final great harvest.

But the day when the angel appears and cries – put in your sickle for the harvest is ripe – that day has not yet come.

The full number of the saved is not yet complete.

And the incredible truth is that you and I are given the privilege of participating in adding to the grain harvest.

Listen to John 4:35-36:

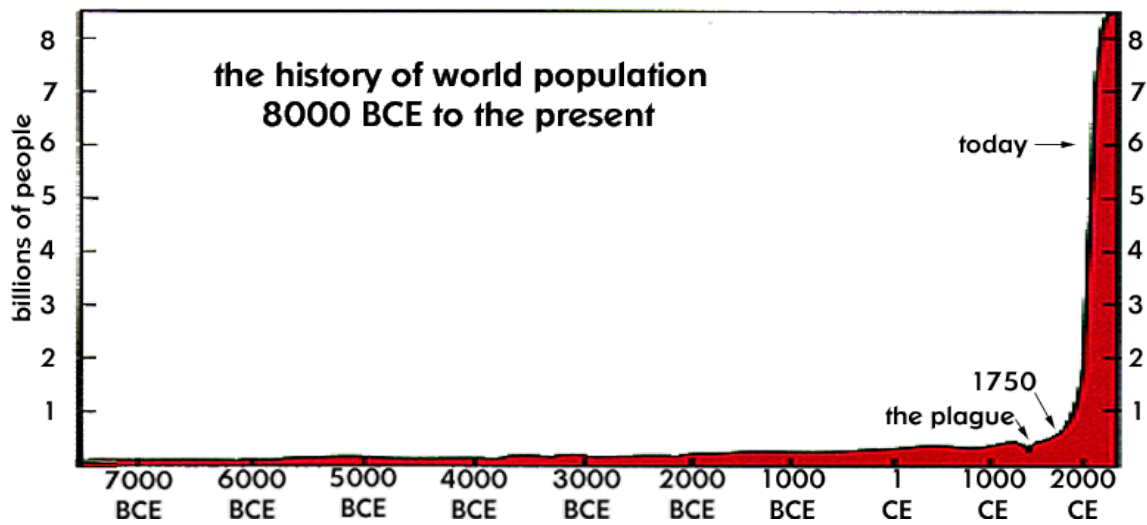
Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.'

Now I want you to exercise your imagination once more. This time I want you to imagine every person alive **today**. Today we have a little over 6 billion people living on our world.

² Cited in Julia Duin's, "Praise the Lord and Pass the New Wine," *Charisma* (Aug 1994): 24, cited in Counterfeit Revival, p. 97.

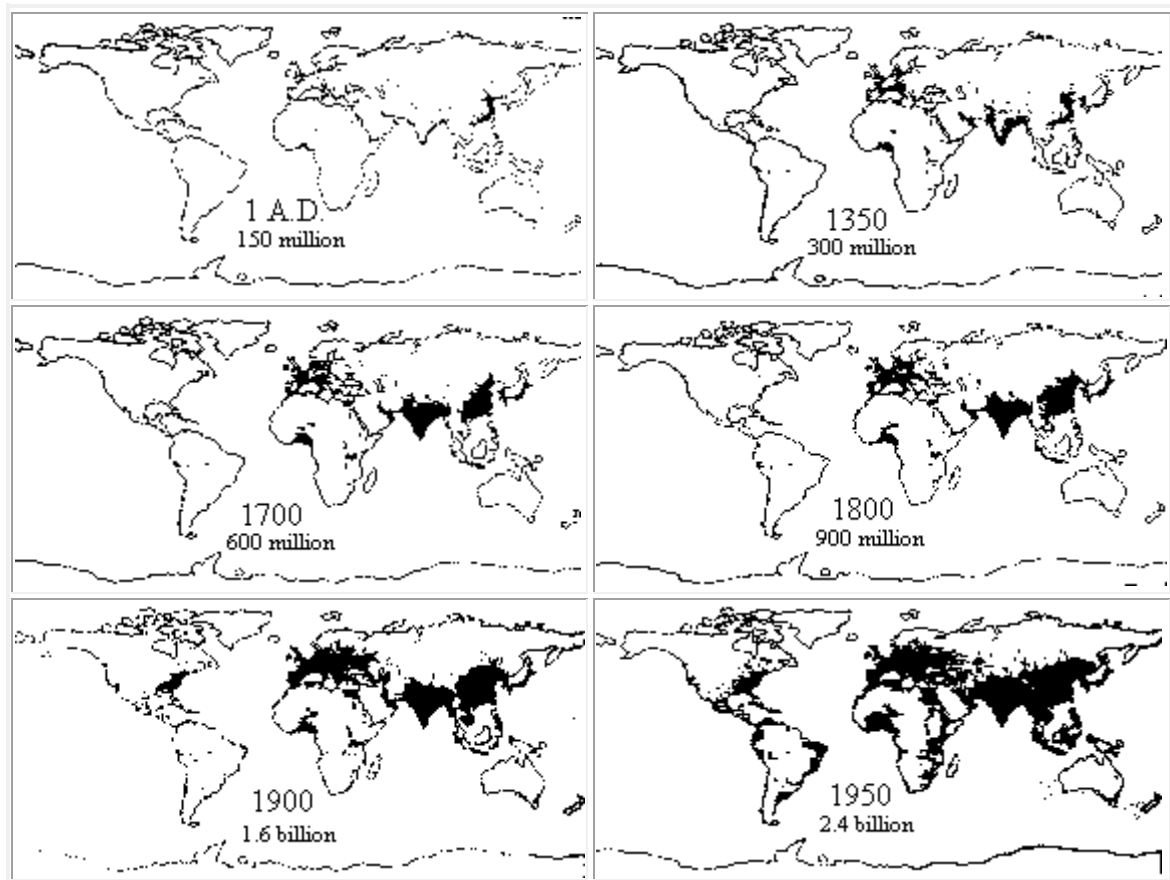
Let me give you some idea of what that means in terms of world history.

There are far more people alive today than at any other time in history.

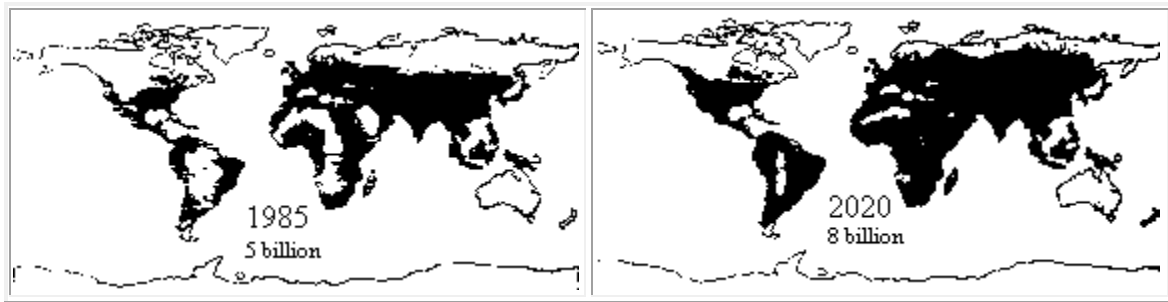


Or if you like your maps better than graphs try these.³

In these maps - **each dot represents 1 million people.**



³ Maps are from an article by **John H. Tanton**, "End of the Migration Epoch," reprinted by *The Social Contract*, Vol IV, No 3 and Vol. V, No. 1, 1995.



Or maybe you are a sheer numbers type of person.⁴

History of World Population

Year	Population estimate in million
5000 BC	5 - 20
1000 BC	50
500 BC	100
1 AD	170 - 400
500 AD	190 - 206
1000 AD	254 - 345
1500 AD	425 - 540
1700 AD	600 - 679
1800 AD	813 - 1,125
1850 AD	1,128 - 1,402
1900 AD	1,550 - 1,762
1930 AD	2,070
1950 AD	2,400
1974 AD	4,000
1999 AD	6,000
2020 AD	8,000

My point is that in the last 100 years, more men and women lived and died than in all the centuries from Adam to the start of the 20th century.

⁴ Source: UN and the US Census Bureau.

Alive today are over six billion souls. In the next twenty years, two billion children will be born. Two billion more souls.

We live at that point in history when the fields are the whitest for harvest they have ever been.

Understand what this means. On the one hand it means that hell is filling up faster than ever before.

But on the other hand it means the opportunity to reach men has never been greater.

So the obvious question is this. What are you doing about it?

And you say – me! What can I do?

You and I know that only the gospel can save men. If I were God I would not have entrusted us with the gospel. We are so unreliable – so afraid – so self-consumed – so pre-occupied we barely ever share.

If I were God – every ten years or so I would peel back the heavens – stick My head through and say – I love you – but you will repent – now!

I would send angels of flaming fire to declare the glories of the cross.

But, God doesn't do that. In His wisdom He sent us – you and me. It is our task to tell men the gospel. His task is to break the hearts of those He chooses.

We share – He converts – and the grain harvest grows.

So how are you doing?

You may not be able to do too much about six billion souls. But with the aid of the Lord you can do something about souls – one at a time.

Think now about **one** face. A friend, a brother, a son, a neighbour.

That face you can help. That face you can tell of Christ's love. Do you love that face like Christ loves that face?

Do you feel compassion? Are you distressed that they are lost?

Listen to Jesus. Matthew 9:36-38:

Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

At the end of time there will be two harvests – the grain harvest of the saved and the grape harvest of the lost.

But today – we have a role in adding to the grain harvest. The harvest that sees men move from darkness to light.

But you have to act. You have to share. You have to plead. You have to invite. You have to declare.

And with the blessing of the Lord – there will be a few more grains in the harvest of the saved.

Louis Pasteur, the pioneer of immunology, lived at a time when thousands of people died each year of rabies. Pasteur had worked for years on a vaccine. Just as he was about to begin experimenting on himself, a 9-year-old, Joseph Meister, was bitten by a rabid dog.

The boy's mother begged Pasteur to experiment on her son. Pasteur injected Joseph for ten days – and the boy lived.

Decades later, of all the things Pasteur could have had etched on his headstone, he asked for three words: JOSEPH MEISTER LIVED.

Nineteen years ago – two men on a college campus began to share Christ with a very lost soul.

They told that lost soul of Christ. They tried acts of kindness, they pleaded, they exhorted, they prayed.

This went on for month after month with little progress.

Finally, they were convinced that this was one soul destined for the great wine press of God's wrath.

But, then the Lord moved my heart, convicted me of my sin and led me to the cross.

I am profoundly grateful to those two men. Without the gospel they cared enough to share – I know what my fate would have been. I would have been trampled by Christ and tortured forever.

And of all the epitaphs those two men will have – among them are these words – CRAIG LLOYD LIVES.

Do you have epitaphs? Are there names snatched from the winepress of God's wrath because you cared enough to share?