A Thousand Years to Proclaim the Gospel;
A Thousand Years to Reign with Christ

Revelation 20:1-6

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| **Natural Divisions** | * Revelation 20:1-3 John saw an angel who came and bound Satan, imprisoning him in the Abyss, so that he might not deceive the nations for 1000 years.
* Revelation 20:4 All believers from all ages who have died have gone into the presence of Christ to reign with Him from heaven during the church age—represented figuratively as 1000 years.
* Revelation 20:5-6 At the end of the age, the wicked dead will be resurrected to judgment and condemnation, which will be their second death.
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| **Summary Sentence** | During the church age (figuratively described as 1000 years), Satan has been bound to prevent his deceiving the nations, so that the gospel may be proclaimed and received in all nations, and believers who have died will reign with Christ from heaven prior to His second advent.  |
| **Central Idea** |  There is a new world coming  (Satan is under restraint so that the gospel may advance in the nations) |

What is our hope for the future? What is the hope and the promise of the Bible? What is God’s plan for God’s plan for eternity? Where is history going? Where is this world headed?

The overall message of the Bible is that God is building a Kingdom. It will be a perfect Kingdom; it will be an eternal Kingdom; it will be a Kingdom where Jesus will reign, and God will dwell with His people. There will be no sin; there will be no illness or death; and all of the citizens of that eternal Kingdom will be people of God, followers of Christ, perfect creations of God’s hand.

The Bible as a whole tells us about God’s eternal Kingdom.

In the first two chapters of the Bible, in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we learn that God created the universe in glorious perfection. God created man and woman as perfect, sinless beings. God created our earth as a perfect environment for man, and God was present with man in the Garden of Eden.

We learn all of this in the first two chapters of the Bible. We learn in the first two chapters of the Bible what God has prepared for His people, and what God intends for His people. God’s original creation was perfect, glorious, beyond what we could ever ask or think.

But then, in Genesis chapter 3, there was the fall of man, and the fall of man changed everything. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin and death entered the world. When Adam and Eve sinned, that sin infected all of creation. Because of their sin, mankind has been changed. We are all born with a sin nature, and it is now our nature to rebel against God, to reject the authority of God, and to live selfishly.

The fall of man changed everything, and our world is no longer the perfect environment that God designed.

Whereas the first two chapters of the Bible reveal God’s perfect original creation, the last two chapters of the Bible reveal God’s perfect final creation—God’s perfect, ultimate, eternal Kingdom. **There’s a new world coming**. God is building His future Kingdom. It will be glorious, and it will be eternal.

Everything you find in the Bible between the first two chapters and the last two chapters is God’s revelation to us of how we’re going to get from the perfection of His original creation to the perfection of His final creation. God is building His Kingdom.

**There’s a new world coming**. In the last two chapters of the Bible, in Revelation 21 and 22 (we’re not there yet), we’re going to see God’s provision of a perfect re-created heaven and earth. This will be the fullness of the Kingdom of God. This re-created earth is our ultimate eternal destiny. In the last two chapters of the Bible, God reveals that one day all of God’s people will be sinless and perfect, and we will dwell with God in a sinless universe under the righteous reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So there are two chapters at the beginning of the Bible that describe God’s perfect original creation, and there are two chapters at the end of the Bible that describe God’s perfect future eternal home for God and man together. This is the Kingdom that God is building.

In between those chapters, the Bible tells the story of redemption and forgiveness and judgment. In between Paradise past and Paradise future, we see the story of the strong hand of God accomplishing His victory over sin and death.

In a couple of weeks we’re going to be studying these glorious last two chapters of the Bible, but we’re not there yet. We haven’t come to Revelation 21 yet; we’re only at Revelation chapter 20. And no matter what your view of how Revelation should be interpreted, no one considers the kingdom described in Revelation 20 as being that perfect, sinless eternal state. No one considers this thousand-year kingdom described in Revelation 20 as being the fullness of the Kingdom of God. We’re not there yet.

Our ultimate destiny is the new Jerusalem—the new heaven and earth—the eternal Kingdom of God where we will dwell in perfect righteousness with God forever. **There’s a new world coming**, and that new world is our future hope. That new creation is our destiny. We’ll be reading about that future eternal Kingdom in chapters 21 and 22.

But today, we’re in chapter 20. Open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 20.

Last week, in chapter 19, we studied the return of Christ to destroy His enemies and to cleanse the earth of evildoers. Last week we saw that under the influence of Satan, the beast and the false prophet had gathered together the kings of the nations and the ungodly of the earth to make war against God and against God’s people.

But we saw that this gathering of the nations for war will end in the most decisive victory in history. When this gathering of the nations occurs, Jesus will return in instant victory. Jesus will return as a warrior and a judge. Jesus will return, and with the word of His mouth Jesus will destroy the ungodly.

At the end of the church age, all of the wicked will be destroyed. At the end of the church age, when Jesus returns, all of the ungodly—all unbelievers—will be taken away for judgment. We saw that event in chapter 19.

So now we come to chapter 20. How are we to understand this chapter? What does it mean in chapter 20 when it says that Satan is bound? There seems to be a portrayal in chapter 20 of Christ’s reigning for 1000 years, but if you’re reading ahead, you know that in the last half of this chapter, Satan is going to be released at the end of the thousand years, and it seems that Satan will *again* gather the nations in rebellion against God and against His people.

Where do these rebellious people come from? Weren’t they destroyed by Jesus in chapter 19?

Also in chapter 20 we see another instant defeat of the ungodly. We saw that in chapter 19; now we seem to see it again in chapter 20. We see fire from heaven come down to consume all of the ungodly who have gathered in rebellion against God. It all seems so similar to chapter 19. How are we to understand the events of chapter 20?

This chapter has been a matter of dispute among scholars from the first century until this day. We are not going to resolve the dispute this morning.

It’s not just that there are two ways of looking at this chapter; rather, there are many views of this chapter. We’re not going to resolve the dispute this morning.

My desire for you is that you treat with respect those who differ with you in your understanding of the book of Revelation. Throughout the Christian community, scholars hold different views of this book. There are several *valid* approaches to interpreting this book. We ought not let our views of the interpretation of Revelation be a cause for division among us.

Whatever view you’ve been taught about the events we expect to occur at the end of the age, be aware that there are many Christian scholars throughout history who have held a different view.

Whatever interpretation you’ve embraced, be aware that there are many Christians who are just as committed to the inerrancy of Scripture as you are, who have held a different interpretation.

Whatever your view of the meaning of the images in Revelation, there are many Christians who are just as careful and scholarly in their study of the material as you are, who hold a different view.

I urge you that you not let your conclusions regarding the interpretation of Revelation be a cause of division between you and your brothers and sisters in Christ. There are several valid, evangelical, God-honoring approaches to interpreting this book.

At the end of your CBS spiral notebook, on page 185, you will find a comparison of four common views of the timeline of the course of the church age. I have these views on the overhead, but you won’t be able to read the details of these views on the overhead; the printing is just too small, so you might want to turn to page 185 in your notebook.

You see here four popular views, but there are actually several more views than these four. One of the views that is not in this list is the progressive dispensational premillennial view, which is the view that I was taught at Dallas Theological Seminary. I’m not going to take you through all of these views, but let’s look first at what all of these views have in common. Let’s look first at what all Christians affirm about the end of the age.

*All* of these views affirm that one day Jesus will return in bodily form. *All* of these views affirm that one day Jesus will raise the dead; He will judge the wicked, and He will establish His eternal kingdom. One day Jesus will establish the final, ultimate form of His Kingdom, where there will be no death and there will be no sin. **There is a new world coming**. The ultimate Kingdom of God is an eternal Kingdom on a new earth, and all of these views agree that this eternal kingdom is our future hope.

These views of future events differ from one another, but it is *not* the case that any one or more of these views constitute heresy. These are all *valid* views. These are all orthodox views. Where these views differ, they do not divide Christians from non-Christians. These are all *valid* views. Orthodox Christianity teaches, and Christians agree, that at the end of the age, Jesus will return to raise the dead, to judge the wicked, and to establish His eternal Kingdom. Those are the elements you find in the Nicene Creed; those are elements where we all agree.

Look with me at verses 1-3 of Revelation chapter 20. *“And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.”*

In the book of Revelation, when you see the clause *“And I saw,”* or *“Then I saw,”* or *“I saw,”* what you have in each case is a separate vision given to John, and John’s visions may *not* represent events that will occur in chronological order. We can’t be sure that the visions John receives portray sequentially occurring events in future history. We’ve already seen that the vision John received in Revelation 12 of the woman about to give birth to Jesus was a vision that was out of sequence in the progress of the events being described in Revelation.

So we don’t know if the visions in Revelation 20 describe events that follow the events in Revelation 19, or if the visions of chapter 20 are an instant replay of events that have already occurred. We just don’t know.

What we see in the first three verses of chapter 20 is that there is a time when Satan is bound. Satan is restrained; Satan is prevented from deceiving the nations anymore in the way that he had previously deceived them.

Now look at verses 4-6. *“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”*

We have a description in chapter 20 of a long period of time—a time represented as 1000 years—when Satan is bound and is unable to deceive the nations. During this period of time, believers who have died have come to life and are reigning with Christ for 1000 years. This period of time is referred to as the Millennium, or the Millennial Kingdom.

Although there are various views about the nature of this Millennial Kingdom, everyone agrees that this Millennial Kingdom is not our eternal destiny. This is not the eternal state. God is building His Kingdom, and this is not it.

The Millennium is a period of 1000 years on *this* earth during which Satan will be bound and Jesus will reign with His people. Satan will be restrained so that he will not be able to deceive the nations anymore in the way that he had previously deceived them.

In your commentary, you will find a fairly detailed analysis of the Dispensational Premillennial view of the Millennial Kingdom. According to this view, the events of chapter 20 follow the events of chapter 19.

According to the Dispensational Premillennial view, after Christ returns (in chapter 19) to bring destruction on all of His earthly enemies, there will then be a time when Jesus will reign on this earth for 1000 years. All of the men and women throughout the course of history who have lived and died as people of faith will have been resurrected; they will have immortal, glorified bodies, and they will reign with Christ during this Millennial period.

According to this Dispensational Premillennial view, there will also be mortals on earth during the time of the Millennial Kingdom. These would be Christians who are still alive in the day of Christ’s return. These would be Christians who have not died during these final cataclysmic events on earth. These mortal believers will live and marry and reproduce and fill the earth and die during the Millennial Kingdom.

So according to this view, there are two types of believers who enter the Millennial Kingdom. There are those who have previously died and who have been resurrected or changed to have glorified, immortal bodies, and there will also be those who became believers during the final years of tribulation, but who have not yet died. These mortal believers will live and marry and reproduce, and some of the generations of their offspring will not become believers. Some of these mortal offspring will live with hearts that are cold toward God.

At the end of this millennial period, Satan will be released. There will then be another rebellion and gathering of the nations, and another instant victory of Christ and the final destruction of this earth. We’ll read more about that next week.

There is another view of Revelation chapter 20 that you won’t see described in detail in your commentary, and according to that view—the amillennial view—chapter 20 begins another rewind—another instant replay—that takes us back to the beginning of the church age. The amillennial view is very different from the dispensational premillennial view, but both views agree that the central idea of the teaching of the Bible is the same. Both views agree that God is building His eternal Kingdom. Both views agree that **there is a new world coming**, and that Christians will live forever in the presence of God *not in the Millennial Kingdom*, but on a perfect, recreated earth.

According to the amillennial view of Revelation 20, the binding of Satan took place with the coming of Christ. It’s not that Satan was totally removed from the earth, but that with the coming of Christ, Satan was restrained so that the gospel was effectively preached to the nations. The blessing of salvation has been proclaimed and received among every tribe and tongue and people and nation. From the time of the coming of Christ, the knowledge of God has not been primarily for the Jews; the knowledge of God has spread among all the nations. During the church age, Satan’s ability to deceive the nations has been restrained.

How might one argue that Satan is already bound during the church age? The only other references to the binding of Satan are found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke—all in the same context. In Matthew chapter 12, Jesus had cast out demons from a demon-possessed man, and the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan. But Jesus said that the fact that this demon-enslaved man had been set free proved that Jesus had first *bound* the *“strong man”* who had possessed him.

In this metaphor, the term *“strong man”* refers to Satan, and Jesus claimed that He had bound the *“strong man”*—Jesus had bound Satan—as evidenced by the fact that Jesus was casting out demons.

This is how Jesus put it in Matthew 12:28-29. *“But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. …how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first binds the strong man? Then he can rob his house.”* The message here is that because Jesus is able to cast out demons, you can know that Satan is bound; you can know that the first stage of the Kingdom of God has come.

According to the amillennial view, Satan was bound when Christ’s earthly ministry began. The reign of Christ described in Revelation 20 is the present reign of Christ during the period of time between Christ’s first coming and His second coming. During this time—during the church age—believers who die enter the heavenly presence of Christ and when we die, we will be in His presence as He reigns from heaven.

At the end of the age, Satan will be released, and Satan will gather the nations for war. Jesus will return to instantly destroy His enemies. At that time, when Jesus returns, Jesus will raise the dead, judge the wicked, and establish His eternal Kingdom on the re-created earth. **There’s a new world coming**, and we’ll learn more about that glorious event in a couple of weeks.

According to the amillennial view, when we read the term *“one thousand years”* in Revelation 20:1-3, we read it as a figurative term. *“One thousand years”* is the number ten—the number of perfection—raised to the third power. It is ten times ten times ten. It represents a long period of time that is the perfect, ideal period of time determined by God for the church age. The precise length of this time has not been revealed, but it will be the perfect length of time.

During this perfect length of time, during the time of Christ’s heavenly reign, Satan is bound, and the gospel prevails. Satan’s power has not been eliminated, but Satan and his evil are under restraint. The gospel is spreading. The message of salvation is going to the ends of the earth. The nations are responding to the good news of Christ.

So according to the amillennial view, we are enjoying the blessings of Christ’s reign from heaven during the church age. Believers who have died are in the heavenly realm with Jesus, and they are reigning with Him.

At some point in the future, in God’s perfect timing, Satan will released and he will again have power to deceive the nations. At that time, Satan will gather the nations under the authority of the beast to make war against God and against God’s people, and at that time, Christ will return, and He will defeat the armies of the beast with a word.

We saw this battle in Revelation 19, and according to the amillennial view, we see this same battle described as an instant replay in Revelation 20:7-10. Jesus will not only destroy His enemies with a word, He will also completely destroy this fallen earth. When Jesus returns, there will be the final judgment. Satan will be cast out, the wicked will be judged, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. God’s eternal Kingdom will begin.

We haven’t yet talked about the concepts in our passage of the “first resurrection” and the “second death,” but we will cover those next week.

In your discussion groups, and in the lecture, we have looked at two widely held views of Revelation chapter 20 and the Millennial Kingdom. These views I’ve given are not the only two widely held views; there are others. There is not general agreement about how this chapter should be understood.

But if we look beyond this chapter, and in fact, look beyond the many other areas of disagreement about the interpretation of Revelation, we can all agree about some foundational truths that we find in Revelation.

We all agree that one day Jesus will return to raise the dead, to judge the wicked, and to establish God’s eternal Kingdom. We all agree that **there’s is a new world coming**, a world of perfection, a world where God and man live in perfect harmony forever. That is good news. Praise God!