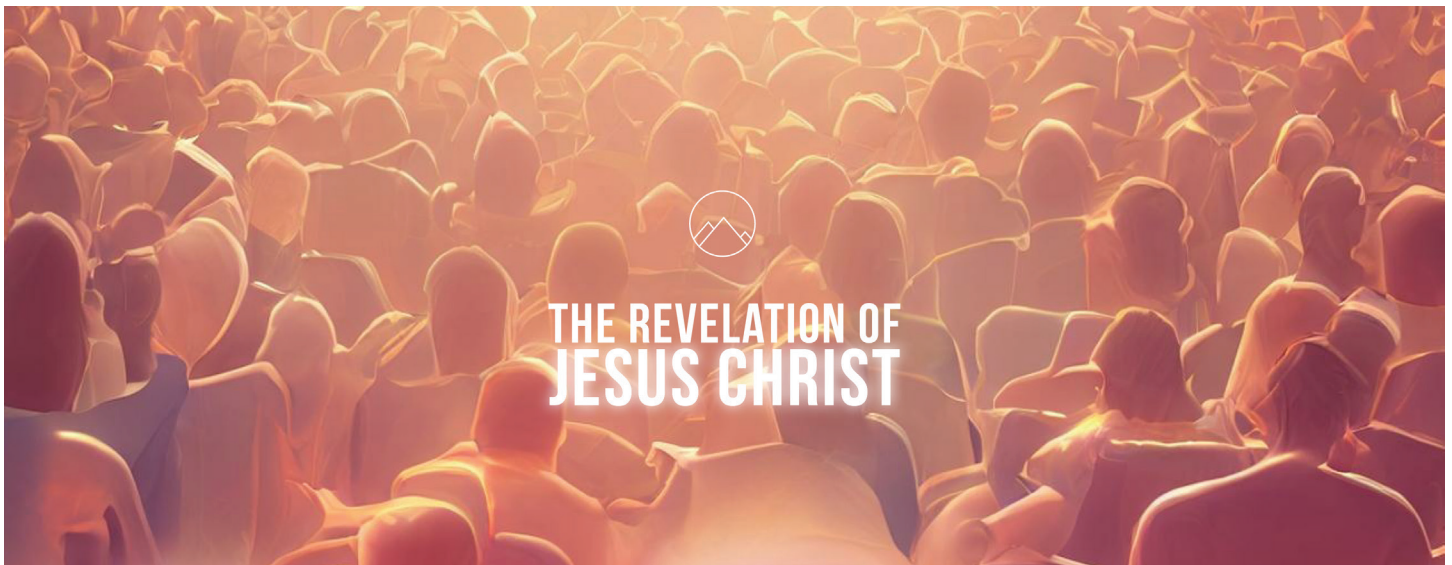




Sunday, June 2
Revelation 20:11-15

Last week we tackled one of the most controversial texts in the entirety of the Book of Revelation as we walked through what John meant when he talked about the second coming of Jesus Christ and the millennium reign as it pertains to the last days. And it seems that there are three main positions that come to the forefront on what this is and when this will take place. I'd like to give you a little review before going into the rest of Chapter 20 today because it's important that you know your options and that no matter where you land in any of these options, that they all agree on the main thing. That Jesus Christ wins. He is victorious and because He is victorious, we too are victorious!

The Premillennialists view the millennium as a literal 1000 year period of time when Jesus Christ will rule the earth in bodily form upon His second coming at which time He will bind Satan. The falling apart of the world will signify His return. And after his 1000 year reign He will release Satan but then capture him and throw him in the lake of fire with the Beast of the Sea and the Beast of the Earth.

The Postmillennialists believe that the millennial rule is a symbolic period of time in which Christ rules spiritually over the world through the power of the Holy Spirit in His sons and daughters. And as the Gospel makes its way into the world - just like a mustard seed - it starts off small but grows in strength and size. Therefore, they believe that revivals and mass salvations and general peace on earth are signs that indicate we are living in the millennium and as this season becomes greater and stronger, it will trigger the second coming of the Lord - not mass destruction like the pre-millennialists suggest. They believe that Satan was bound at the cross and when Christ comes He will release Him but then capture him and throw him in the lake of fire with the beasts.

The Amillennialists believe that the millennium is a symbolic period representing the current church age, which spans from Christ's first coming to His second coming. They interpret the 1,000 years

mentioned in Revelation 20 as a figurative number representing a long, undefined period of time during which Christ reigns spiritually in the hearts of believers. Amillennialists also believe that Satan was bound at the cross but that the binding process was started at the birth of Christ. As such Satan's ability to deceive the nations is restricted, although his influence is still present in the world through the two beasts and their hoards. During this time, the Gospel is preached, and the Holy Spirit empowers believers to live out Christ's teachings. They do not expect a distinct future period of peace and righteousness before Christ's return like the postmillennialists do, but they see the kingdom of God as already present and growing in the lives of believers. When Christ returns, it will be to put the finishing touches on His victory over sin and death. Satan will be released for a brief period to test the faithfulness of believers, but he will ultimately be defeated, captured, and thrown into the lake of fire along with the Beast of the Sea and the Beast of the Earth. This final defeat of Satan will usher in the final judgment and the establishment of a new creation, where believers will dwell with God for eternity.

In addition to all of this, Premillennialists place a lot of significance on ethnic Israel as the people of God, viewing the promises to Israel in the Old Testament as being literally fulfilled in the future. They interpret the mention of the 144,000, as a literal group of ethnic Jews who will be saved during the end times.

In contrast, postmillennialists, and amillennialists, see the people of God as the Church, which includes both Jews and Gentiles who have accepted Christ as Saviour. They interpret the 144,000 in Revelation symbolically, representing the entirety of the Church. For them, this number symbolizes completeness and perfection, indicating that all of God's people—both Jews and Gentiles—are included in His redemptive plan.

Out of these three, the only one to talk about a rapture and great tribulation are the dispensational premillennialists who argue that Christians will be taken up to meet Christ in the air before a period of intense tribulation on earth and before the second coming of Christ. According to their view, this rapture occurs prior to a seven-year period of suffering and chaos known as the Great Tribulation, during which God's wrath is poured out on a sinful world. They believe that during this time, many will come to faith in Christ, but will face severe persecution. After the tribulation, Christ will then return with His saints to establish His literal 1,000-year reign on earth, binding Satan and initiating a period of peace and righteousness.

Part of the challenge with this view is that the book of Revelation does not talk about a separate rapture event at all and so we have to go to the book of 1 Thessalonians where the Apostle Paul talks of the second coming of Christ saying that at that moment, the dead in Christ shall rise followed by those Christians who are alive and remain and they will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Because there is no mention of the beasts and dragon being thrown into the lake of fire here, premillennialists view this as a separate event whereas the post and amillennialists would say that this passage describes the single event of Christ's return which incorporates both the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of living believers at the same event. They believe this event coincides with the final judgment, where Christ will deal with all

evil. For them, the absence of explicit details about the judgment in 1 Thessalonians does not imply a separate rapture event but rather that Paul is focusing on the hope and reunion of believers with Christ. They interpret this catching up as the beginning of the final phase of God's redemptive plan, where Christ's return, the resurrection, the transformation of believers, and the final judgment all occur in one cohesive sequence.

And although the Book of Revelation does mention a Great Tribulation in Chapter 7, John's point is not so much pointing to a futuristic event, but emphasizing the fact that tribulation is something that every generation of Christianity in the past, present and future will or has experienced.

The idea that Satan was bound at the cross and not at the second coming of Christ seems to me to line up best with Scripture. This would help to explain why he gives his power, throne, and authority to the two beasts, as they are his representation here on the earth while he is bound in chains.

In Revelation 13, the beasts are described as the Beast of the Sea and the Beast of the Earth. The Beast of the Sea is often associated with political powers, while the Beast of the Earth is associated with religious powers. So, when terms like 'antichrist' and 'false prophet' are used, they refer to these two beasts. The language of 'antichrist' is meant to draw the reader's attention to the nature of the Beast of the Sea, symbolizing leaders - past, present and future - who manipulate political power to deceive. This is considered the spirit of the antichrist which has been in existence past, present and future. Similarly, the Beast of the Earth is likened to a false prophet, representing all those who manipulate religion for deception, past, present and future.

When discussing powers and principalities like these and even others in both the Kingdom of Light and the kingdom of darkness, it's important to recognize that there are authority structures in place. In his book "Supernatural," Michael Heiser details this heavenly authority structure, referring to the divine council - a group of angelic beings with significant authority who help establish God's rule throughout the universe. Similarly, an authority structure also exists in the kingdom of darkness.

A clear example of this is found in the book of Daniel. Daniel, while praying by the Tigris River, waits for an answer from God for three days. Suddenly, an angel appears and informs Daniel that his prayer was heard immediately, but the response was delayed.

In Daniel 10:13; 20b he says:

'But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.' And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come.

This clearly shows us that there is a very real and active spiritual authority structure that is at play within our cities and governments. So when Paul says that our battle is not against flesh and blood, this helps to bring great perspective to that.

It also helps to understand that even though Satan is bound, his power, throne, and authority have been disseminated to the beasts, who in turn delegate it to kings, princes, and other demonic beings that do the bidding of their dark lord.

Now, all of this can sound intimidating, perhaps scary, but let me remind you that the point of chapter 20 is to reassure us of the ultimate victory of Christ. That no matter where you align yourself on the timing of His return and the elements involved, the main thing that we can all agree on is that Satan's defeat is certain, irrevocable and eternal. Christ's resurrection has already secured this victory, and His second coming will bring about the final judgment and the establishment of a new heaven and new earth.

And so in our text today, it is the second half of Chapter 20 where we will read more about this:

Revelation 20:11-15

'Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.'

John makes it very clear that the first thing that we see now is the great white throne. Which is interesting, because throughout the entire book, we have encountered numerous scenes where the throne is a central element. However, this scene is different. Unlike previous throne-room scenes, there is no glass sea here, no emerald rainbow, no flashes of lightning or blasts of thunder, no 24 elders, no creatures, and no lampstands. It's just the great white throne. This is the entire scene now set before us, and it is a gloriously powerful and awe-filled sight.

And the first thing we see in this scene is that the combination of the Great White Throne and the face of Him who is sitting on the throne is so powerful and intense that the earth and heaven literally flee away. Which may seem confusing at first, but the point that John is making here is that the purity and perfection of this scene is such that it is contrasted with the imperfections of the earth and the cosmos (the skies and stars) that have been ravaged by sin and simply cannot remain in the presence of God's absolute perfection. They are contaminated beyond the possibility of cleansing which is why God will create a new heaven and a new earth in the next chapter. This very moment signifies the end of the old creation, which has been tainted by sin and corruption, and the ushering in of a new, perfect creation where God will dwell with His people in perfect harmony forever.

The next section - verse 12-15 - needs to be covered as a whole because this is the section where judgment is now being pronounced on the dead. And it needs to be understood that as God pronounces judgment, He does it from the Great White Throne. And the colour of the throne is significant because historically white was the colour of purity, holiness and even authority. That, He who

judges from that throne is the One who is pure, holy and holds all authority. And as we've learned before, He is a righteous judge. That His judgment is always correct, lawful and just.

And so we learn that everyone who has ever lived will now experience this judgment. We learn that the sea, death and hades all give up the dead to be judged. Which again might be a confusing picture, but is really just best understood as John's way of saying that this judgment is fully comprehensive. That not one person will be missed. In ancient times, the sea was often seen as a mysterious and chaotic place, representing the unknown and unreachable. By stating that even the sea gives up its dead, the text emphasizes that no one is beyond the reach of God's final judgment. Death refers to the state of being dead, and Hades refers to the realm of the dead (the grave or the underworld). Again, this is John's way of saying that this is fully comprehensive. Everyone will experience this.

As part of that experience, we each have a book of sorts that records how we lived our lives and what we did in detail. This record is fully comprehensive, including both the things we want others to know about and the things we would rather keep hidden. Everything is in there and it is upon this record that it says we will all be judged.

This statement alone has sparked controversy for some because it seems to suggest that our salvation is now tied to the things that we have done - our works and deeds. Which clearly goes against numerous scriptural teachings that teach that we are not saved by works but by grace:

Ephesians 2:8-9

'...by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.'

And so even though works don't earn salvation, it's important to understand that works are intimately connected to salvation in the sense that they help to identify those that are saved and as James 2:18 says:

'Faith without works is dead.'

Meaning that genuine faith naturally produces good works. These works are not the basis of our salvation but they are an evidence of a living and active faith. The judgment of works, then, is not about determining our salvation but about evaluating the faithfulness of our lives and the fruit of our faith.

So because of this, we know that this time of judgment for Christians simply cannot be tied to their salvation.

We see this clearly with the introduction of a second book now. This is the Book of Life and this is the book that has the names written in it for salvation.

Which raises an interesting question for me. As Christians, if our names are already written in the Book of Life and our salvation is secure, why would God need to judge our works and our deeds? Further to that, for those whose names aren't recorded in the Book of Life, we know that they are already destined to eternal separation from the Lord, so what point does judging their works serve?

I think the answer is two-fold. As I said earlier, God judges the works of believers to hold them accountable and reward their faithfulness, while the judgment of works for unbelievers demonstrates God's justice and ensures that the punishment fits the crime, making His judgment fair and righteous - remember the white throne from which He executes His rule. He is a righteous judge and His judgment is always correct, lawful and just. So for the person who rejected salvation, their book may very well be filled with many, many good deeds but this will be a sobering time when they realize that no amount of good deeds can earn their salvation. Therefore, the judgment of works underscores both the grace of salvation and the comprehensive justice of God.

Here's how I visualize it. When God opens up my book, there's gonna be some good stuff in there, right? Just like many of your books as well. However, this book isn't going to just show the good works of our lives. It's also going to show the bad....and the ugly. And so, there is also going to be a whole lot of bad stuff in these books of ours. Probably more bad than good if we're being honest. Stuff that we are embarrassed about, stuff that we don't want anyone to know about, and the very thought of that being read aloud, can spark anxiety for many of us. But I don't think it should. You see, somehow, I think that the point of opening these books publicly actually serves to show the power of God's grace. That we will be standing there in His presence, already knowing how badly we messed up. But this isn't the only book, there's another book. And that book has my name in it and that book secures my salvation for eternity! Why?? Because the price for my sins has already been paid for. Jesus' blood has covered my sins...all the embarrassing and awful and evil things that we have done. Perhaps then, because this is true, what if there will be many pages in the book of my life that are just blood stained red. That the words on these pages simply aren't legible anymore, because they have been washed with the blood of the lamb.

Friends I don't think that this will be an embarrassing moment for us as Christians, I think that this will be a momentous moment of worship where we fall to our knees in awe of the One who has rescued us from the holds of sin and death. Knowing that when we were at our weakest, He was all-powerful!

And that right there is the point!! How great is our God, you ask?? Just look at the book of your life when He opens it and see how much red has stained the pages, and then we will know!!

Friends, as I see it, there are two options before us: We can choose to live our lives trying to be good enough on our own, or we can accept the grace that Jesus offers, knowing that His sacrifice has already made us clean. The first path leaves us with an anxiety-filled judgment where our sins are exposed without remedy. The second path leads to a joyous revelation of God's grace, where our sins are covered, and our salvation is secured. **Which path will you choose?**

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