

## Lessons and Last Things

We are looking at Revelation 20 today. I've said we've been trying to present a pastoral look at Revelation, to point out things I believe John wanted his churches to understand. This series hasn't been about predicting things that will occur in the future but instead pointing out the message in Revelation that had an immediate impact on how John's readers lived their lives. I believe this book has important lessons for us about how we should be living our lives and conducting ourselves in light of Babylon's influence and the direct opposition of the beast. John didn't say, "Here's some stuff the Lord showed me but don't worry because it won't matter for about 2,000 years. Good news for your descendants though. They will cash in on writing books and making movies speculating on what all this means." Instead, John writes out of genuine pastoral concern. As we said last Sunday, this is about salvation, a message of promise and warning. The body of the revelation is a fleshing out of the letters to the churches in the opening: Don't compromise with sin, don't align yourself with Babylon, with the empire, don't give up when persecution comes, endure to the end because all those who overcome receive the crown of life and are saved. I've missed these lessons in Revelation most of my life so, once again, what are the lessons for today and how do those lessons effect how we live our lives?

I want to read Revelation 20, give you a quick summary of our A/G position regarding these last things, and then make some observations. To set the stage, remember last week the armies of the beast gathered to fight against the people of God. Jesus, the one who is Faithful and True, who has a name written on his thigh, returns to earth with his saints, speaks the word and the beast and false prophet, the two who caused people to take the mark of the beast and align themselves against God are captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire. The rest of those who had come to fight against the army of God in the valley of Armageddon are defeated by the Word. Now we continue the saga with Revelation 20. (Read chapter 20).

Here is a quick summation of the A/G position regarding the rapture, resurrection, the millennial reign of Christ and the final judgment (what we just read). We believe in the imminent return of the Lord in what we call the rapture of the church or the catching away of the bride of Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us the trumpet of God will sound signaling the return of the Lord for his church. At that time the dead in Christ will rise first and then we who are alive at his coming will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thess.

4) This is the first resurrection John mentions, the resurrection of the righteous dead, those who died in faith.

After the rapture of the church, the earth and its unsaved inhabitants experience a time of trouble as God's wrath is poured out on the earth. We call that the tribulation period. That judgment culminates with the battle scene we talked about last week in Revelation 19. Jesus comes back to the earth with the saints of God and defeats the armies of the anti-Christ (the beast) and the false prophet. They are cast into the lake of fire and Satan himself is bound and imprisoned in the abyss for one thousand years. We call this the millennial reign. During this 1,000 year period, Jesus rules a kingdom here on earth. His capitol will be in Jerusalem and we, the saints of God, will rule and reign with him. We have glorified bodies like his so we don't age or die but people that survived the tribulation period and Armageddon will still be here. During this time Christ's reign will fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah. No more war, there will be justice for all. **"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."** **Isaiah 11:9.** The lion and lamb lay down together, swords are beaten into plow shares. Satan is imprisoned so there is no temptation to sin, no sickness, nothing to hurt or destroy. It's like the Garden of Eden restored with Jesus, the second Adam, reigning over the earth.

At the end of the 1,000 years Satan is released for a short time to deceive the nations and then there is a final battle where fire comes from heaven to consume the armies of Satan. Satan is bound and cast into the lake of fire forever. That's the last we see of him. Then comes the Great White Throne Judgment when all the wicked dead are raised. This is the second resurrection. The books are opened and all those whose names were not written in the Lamb's book of life are thrown into the lake of fire along with the devil. That's the destiny of all who reject God's offer of forgiveness and grace. That's essentially the last days scenario of the Assemblies of God, but as I said, Revelation is not just about the future. There are lessons for us today. First lesson...

**Satan is a deceiver. Don't be deceived.** I said you can't negotiate with the devil. Jesus said Satan is a liar and the father of lies. John describes him as **"the great dragon, that ancient serpent, called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray."** **Revelation 12:9.** The same chapter refers to him as the **"accuser of our brothers"** and he is the one who goes off to make war against the people of God. In Revelation 19 it is said the devil's representatives, the beast and false prophet, **"deluded those who had received the mark of the beast."** Deception

is a primary tool he uses. In verse 3 the devil is bound for 1,000 years **“to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore.”** In verse 7 Satan is released after 1,000 years and **“will go out to deceive the nations.”** Verse 10, **“And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire...”** Deception is his game and John wants to warn his church, his people, “don’t allow yourself to be deceived by the enemy, to be deluded by his lies. Don’t compromise with the beast or with the empire, with Rome.” The message is for us as well. “Don’t align yourself with Babylon, with Washington, New York, Madison Avenue, Hollywood. The beast, the empire, the world, the devil will deceive you, demand your allegiance and then damn your soul.” Don’t listen to the lies of the devil. Don’t allow yourself to be deceived. John keeps the image of battle and war before us because we must remain vigilant and alert and never surrender to the enemy. John urges the church, **“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.” Revelation 14:12** 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson...

**God has the final word. Trust Him.** All we’ve seen in Revelation in general and in chapters 19 and 20 in particular speaks to us of God’s sovereignty, that he is in control and he will have the last word. John’s readers, including us, should thank God for this revelation. Although for a while it looks like Babylon is winning, for a while the beast and the empire are in control, but that’s only for a while. In fact, notice the contrast: in Revelation 17:12 John says those who war against the Lamb will receive authority on earth to rule “for one hour”. An hour. Compared with Christ who will rule for 1,000 years and then forever without end, the rule of the wicked is nothing. The wicked, the proud and arrogant, bullies and liars rule now and it seems they get away with their treachery and violence but God has the final word.

John saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. **“And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus...they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” Revelation 20:4** It was a word of encouragement to the church! “I know it’s hard right now, but the wicked will be judged and those who suffered in this life, you who are willing to lay down your life for Christ will rule and reign with Him.” We worry and fret about the devil and his power and control, about wicked rulers and authorities and powers, but in the end the armies of the enemy are defeated with a word, the beast and false prophet who performed all the signs and miracles are thrown alive into the lake of fire and finally the devil himself, after being imprisoned for 1,000 years is thrown into that same lake of fire to be tormented forever. John is telling his churches,

don't give in to the beast, refuse to bear the mark of compromise with Babylon, because in the end you will rule and reign with Christ. In every way, God has the final say, the final word. It's the ultimate vindication and validation of the people of God. Things may be going against you at the moment, but God will have the last word and that word is Victory! Triumph! 3<sup>rd</sup> lesson...

**We are more broken than we think.** Satan is imprisoned for 1,000 years and upon his release he immediately goes back to his old ways of practicing deception and trying to entice people (the nations) to oppose Christ and his rule. It's amazing when you look at Satan in Revelation. He is defeated in heaven and thrown down to earth in Revelation 12 but it produces no change. Immediately he mounts an attack against the saints of God. In chapter 19 he gathers the kings of the earth to war against God. The false prophet and beast are thrown into the lake of fire and Satan is confined to the abyss and still there is no change. After 1,000 years he is released and goes right back to his old tricks. Let me say again, Satan does not compromise and he won't quit, therefore, those whom he comes against must not compromise and we must not quit. Don't give in because God will bring Satan to a final end! But here is the thing that points to our brokenness. For 1,000 years Satan cannot deceive the nations, the people. For 1,000 years the people of this world are blessed with the peaceful rule and reign of Christ. It is paradise. Nation no longer wars against nation, "ain't gonna study war no more" as the song says. The natural order of things is transformed during this time, giving us a taste of what the final chapters of Revelation with the new heaven and new earth will be like. It's incredible, so how is it even possible that anyone, let alone entire nations and armies and people would march against God and the rule of Christ and his people? **"When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth...to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves." Revelation 20:7-9**

This is no small crowd! "Like the sand on the seashore!" How can this be happening? I think it must have shocked John's readers like it shocks us. How and why would this happen? "They must have been willing." I think it makes this point: we are more broken than we think. It shows us the human condition apart from God. (These are not the resurrected saints of God being deceived, but those who have lived into or been born into the 1,000 year reign.) It confirms what the bible says that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, that apart from salvation and the

new birth, apart from God's grace, brokenness overwhelms. I often wonder how people can grow up in church, experience the presence of God, and then walk away from faith? Well, even after 1,000 years of God's rule, without a new heart, without God's grace changing them, people are once again enticed to sin, drawn away by their own lust. Only God can give a new heart. That's what salvation is about. Regeneration. It's why Jesus said, "You must be born again...born of the Spirit." You have to become a new creation in Christ. **"If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17**

This isn't cause for despair. This isn't John saying, "we are all too broken and at the devil's mercy." This is John saying, "Be on guard and trust God and his all sufficient grace. If you resist the devil and refuse to compromise, the devil will flee. But don't lean on yourself or your own will power, lean on the Lord and rely on him. Our hope and our security, our salvation and deliverance is all found in Him!" 4<sup>th</sup> lesson...

**Judgment is certain.** The bible says it is appointed to all of us once to die and after that the judgment. There is a judgment for the saints of God called the judgment seat of Christ. This is where our deeds done for Christ after we are saved are judged and rewards are given, but we don't face judgment for our sins. Our sins have already been judged and forgiven through our faith in Jesus and his saving grace. The first resurrection is for the righteous, those who have been forgiven and follow Christ so we are already alive – we've lived through the 1,000 years. Now there is another resurrection and judgment and no one escapes it. All are brought to life. John writes, **"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."** Revelation 20:11-15

A couple of quick observations. Notice "earth and sky fled from his presence." It reminds us that everything about the planet has been corrupted by sin and can't stand in the presence of our holy God. Everything is broken and in need of redemption. The earth, sky, death itself,

Hades which is the place of the dead, the sea, the small and the great, everything and everyone bows to the Sovereignty of God at his throne.

It's interesting to me that John said "the books are opened." There were books opened that recorded what people had done, that examined their works, their life. I think this serves as a reminder that God holds everyone accountable for how they live their lives, for the choices they make, both the righteous and the wicked, the saved and the unsaved. It matters how we live. But John is not telling us that salvation will be based on our good or bad works. In fact, he tells us the opposite. In spite of the good works, in spite of the records of the other books, **It all comes down to this one book, the book of life. "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."** It comes down to this. Revelation 21:27 says "only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" will enter heaven. Is your name written in that book of life? The only way to get it there is to confess your sins and ask Jesus to forgive you, to save you and become the Lord of your life. Surrender your life to him and live for him and he will record your name in that book and you won't have to fear that final judgment.

That day of judgment is coming. It is certain and inescapable. John wants his readers to understand the real and terrible threat of judgment because he wants to make sure they avoid judgment and instead experience God's grace and the promise of heaven and eternal life in Christ. Once again, a promise and a warning. Lessons and last things. The question remains, Is your name written in that book? It can be. Today is the day of salvation! Why not ask him into your heart and life today?