

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE END

Thousand Years

Revelation 20

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Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. 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 those 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. And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:1-15, ESV).

A few weeks ago, I was honored to attend one of my favorite moments in life: the finalization of an adoption.

It's a remarkable moment that always moves me to tears. Let me describe it to you. A group of friends and family gather inside a courtroom, a place where the futures of many people are decided. It's sober because this is a big moment for a family and child who have walked through a host of challenges to get

to this point. Adoption is glorious, but it's also complicated. It's celebrative because this is the final step in a long journey. Sometimes there are balloons and signs.

In walks the judge. She sits behind the bench in her black robe and holding her gavel. I would imagine that these are the good days in the role. After a series of formal questions to the parents and lawyers, the judge reads a statement declaring the child to now be the son or daughter of these new parents. A new name is read. The gavel strikes the bench, and with the signature of the judge, a child is adopted. Afterwards the family and judge pose for pictures, and everyone is so grateful.

It's really incredible! There's something so redemptive and hopeful about those moments because a child's life has been changed forever. The actions of a judge changed everything. Her authority and judgment created a hopeful future.

How do the words authority and judgment land on you? They are important and complicated words, aren't they? Authority can be abused. Judgment can be, well, judgmental. Authority and judgment can be terrible misused.

But imagine a world without authority and judgment. It would be anarchy. The good use of authority and making just judgments are essential for human flourishing. That's what I sense in a courtroom with a final adoption hearing—good authority and good judgment.

Authority and judgment are two divinely ordained concepts that we find in the twentieth chapter of Revelation. The text shows us how Jesus exercises authority and judgment. This is a text that could be celebratory, but it depends on the answer to this question: **How do you think about Jesus's authority and judgment?**

Our text today in Revelation highlights the thousand years, the defeat of Satan, and the great judgment. We're getting close to the end of this glorious book, and we're seeing more and more about the victory of Jesus. Let's look at this complicated chapter as we think about two words: authority and judgment.

Authority

Verses 1-6 detail what is often called the millennial kingdom or the thousand-year reign of Christ. This text highlights the authority of Jesus and how God's people benefit from and share in that authority.

Chapter 20 begins with another angel coming down from heaven. Throughout the book of Revelation, we've witnessed an angel coming from heaven in important moments. In chapter 5 it was the angel who said, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals" (5:2). In chapter 10 an angel appeared wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face like the sun (10:1). In chapter 18, an angel came from heaven with great authority and declared, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great" (18:2). Something dramatic is about to happen.

Notice what the angel possesses! He has the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. We've read about the bottomless pit in chapter 9 where a fallen angel/Satan is given a key and allowed to unleash a plague of locusts from the pit. This pit is the prison of evil spirits (2 Pet. 2:4). The angel is holding a key,

which is an important symbol. In Revelation we've heard about the keys of death and Hades (1:18) and the key of David (3:7). Keys indicate authority. Ask a teenager what it feels like when they've been given a key to the car. Or ask a laid off worker what it feels like to "turn in your keys." Keys are meaningful. This angel has a key to the bottomless pit, the prison of demons. But he also has a great chain. This is a personalized element of a prison. It indicates the future restraint of the Devil.

Verses 2-3 tell us what happens next:

And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while (Rev. 20:2-3).

John wants it to be very clear who we are talking about which is why there are four names: dragon, serpent, Devil, and Satan. The text further tells us that Satan is bound for a thousand years. He loses his ability to deceive the nations, but he is released for a little while.

This is yet another place where there is a wide array of views. Some Christians believe the thousand years are symbolic. They believe this time period was inaugurated at Jesus's death, and it continues now. They believe that the language regarding the binding of Satan is also symbolic in that his activities are restricted. This view is often called amillennialism because they don't hold to a literal millennial. Other Christians see this thousand years as more than symbolic. They take it **more** literally as a time when Christ reigns on the earth. This is often called premillennialism. Yet another view is postmillennialism that believes in an improving society where Christ rules in the hearts of people before his second coming.

Let me remind you that I'm preaching a sermon and not giving a lecture on Revelation. We don't have time to unpack these three views, and this is one of the more debated passages among gospel-loving Christians. I'm happy to tell you where I land. But for today, I want to highlight the biblical principle underneath this passage—the authority of Jesus.

Verse 4 identifies this with "thrones" and "authority." This is an important image. With the Devil restrained, God's people exercise their dominion on the earth. Things are starting to return back to the way it was meant to be in the garden. The ones seated on the thrones are described as faithful, both martyrs and those who resisted the Beast. Remember this designation refers to all of God's people who have faithfully endured to the end.

...and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 13:8).

The last part of verse 4 and 5 tells us that these were resurrected while the rest remained in the grave. It's called the first resurrection.¹ And then take careful note of verse 6, because it really is the theme of this section:

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 (Rev. 20:6).

It's a glorious verse, isn't it? By virtue of his authority, Jesus has reclaimed the created world. And those who know and love him share in his righteous reign. Death cannot touch them. I love what James Hamilton says about this text in reference to being a follower of Jesus:

If you are a believer in Jesus, 20:4-6 is describing your future. Satan is gone from the scene. Christ is reigning on earth. You will be raised from the dead to sin no more. No satanic deception. No satanic temptation. In the presence of Christ, you will do justice and serve as a priest to God. This is what you were made to do. You were created to enjoy God as King in God's land in free obedience to God's law. Uncontaminated. Undeified. Unsullied. No devil prowling about like a roaring lion. Freedom. Joy. Righteousness.²

The authority of Jesus creates an eternal flourishing that God's people share in. What's more, God's people are priest-kings. They rule as priests. They are a royal priesthood.

But here's the thing: it's entirely dependent on Jesus and his authority. We come to faith in Christ, and we'll be in Christ for all of eternity.

Judgment

The second theme is about the judgment of Satan and humanity. It's the final action before all things are made new. It's the culmination of God's redemptive plan.

Verse 7 tells us that at the end of the thousand years, Satan is released. He begins, once again, his campaign of deception despite not having the Beast or the False Prophet at his disposal. Satan leads another rebellion with "the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog" (v. 8). This appears to be a symbolic way of describing a massive revolt against the reign of Jesus. Take note that their number is like the "sand of the sea."

They march up the broad plain to attack (v. 9). For fans of *The Lord of the Rings*, think of this like the battle of the Black Gate or the battle of Helm's Deep. The forces of darkness surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city. It would appear that the people of God are in trouble.

¹ Those who don't take the millennium literally hold that this a spiritual resurrection—more like regeneration. Still others believe this to be coming alive in the presence of God in heaven but not an actual physical change.

² James M. Hamilton Jr., [*Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*](#), ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 375.

But God delivers his people and brings judgment in a single moment as fire comes down from heaven and consumes the forces of evil. There is no battle. It's a victory similar to what happened with Elijah and the fire on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:16-45) and to what Ezekiel describes in Ezekiel 38:21-23.

I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Lord God. Every man's sword will be against his brother. With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him, and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples who are with him torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur. So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord (Ezek. 38:21-23).

This is decisive judgment brought about by the King of kings and Lord of lords. With this victory, Jesus turns his attention to the Devil himself. Just listen to verse 10:

...and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10).

The activity and deception of Satan are over. His rebellion against the righteousness of God has been defeated. All that is left for him is eternal judgment.

The remaining verses (vv. 11-15) extend the focus of judgment to all of humanity. It's called the great white throne judgment because of the description in verse 11. Grant Osbourne, in his commentary, suggests that this is unique in Revelation since no other throne is described this way. This throne or event is immense, majestic, pure, and holy.³ In fact, the presence of God in his seated position causes the earth and sky to flee with no place to run or hide. The entire created order is undergoing a massive reformation. Everything is being purified.

Verse 12 shows us the purpose. Everyone is standing before the throne—both small and great. And then the books are opened. What books? In Daniel 7:10, there's a connection between divine judgment and "the books." The books aren't named, but it's clear that they are the record of the deeds of people. The second half of the verse says, "the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done."

The other book in Revelation 20:12 is named. It's called the Book of Life. Many commentators consider this to be similar to the book of registry for a city. The names of citizens were recorded as verification that they belonged there. We'll see this next week when we read Revelation 21:27 with the Lamb's Book of Life. It's the record of who belongs to Jesus.

³ Grant R. Osborne, [Revelation](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 720.

Verse 13 continues the explanation, but it expands the scope to include the sea and the entire realm of death (Death and Hades). There is no realm in the universe that is beyond the reach of this judgment.

So, there are two sets of books. The first set appears to be the divine record of the works of mankind. And we don't know what this will be like. But without being overly dramatic, imagine if it's a divine record of everything every human being has ever done. Imagine what that would be like—every single action of sin and sinful motive recorded for your entire life. Imagine the glory of God emanating from this great white throne and the stunning contrast of your actions—your real actions. The things only you know about but are fully recorded.

What if this book is opened full of overwhelming evidence. And then what if the other book is examined for your name. Imagine the relief at hearing your name read from the Lamb's Book of Life, especially in light of the overwhelming evidence that runs contrary to God's glory.

It's important to understand that human beings are judged by their works and saved by God's grace through faith.

The text ends with the final victory over Satan and a dire warning for anyone still on the fence about Jesus:

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ shows us his authority and his judgment of sin and the Devil. And it identifies two paths in this life that lead to eternal life in heaven (the next two chapters) or hell.

Let me ask you the question with which I started this sermon: **How do you think about Jesus's authority and judgment?**

Implications

There are many things that we could say or conclude about this passage but let me offer two.

You

If you are not yet a Christian, this text is a caution that I would beg you to consider. This shows us the final judgment, when a holy God reveals what we are really like, what we've really done, and holds us accountable for our sinfulness. I would plead with you not to be on the wrong side of God's holiness. Turn to Jesus today. Believe in him. Put your faith in his death for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

If you are a Christian, listen to the hopeful exhortation and challenge from Peter:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received

mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul (1 Pet. 2:9-11).

As you celebrate who you are in Jesus, this is also a call to remember that you are an exile and to put to death the passions of the flesh.

Jesus

The Bible calls Jesus our Prophet, Priest, and King. And this passage shows us why that's so important and beautiful. There is no one else like him. No one who tells us the truth. No one who makes us righteous. No one else who rules with power. This text helps us see how incredible and gracious his death on the cross was for us. Revelation 20 reminds us that everything connected to God's plan of salvation is only because of him. He's going to defeat the Devil. And he made it possible for the names of human beings to be written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Do you love him? Do you marvel at him? Do you think about him?

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

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