

The Mystery of God's Judgment Revelation 20:7-15

As Pastor Dave taught last week, there are varying views on what is meant by this 1000 year, millennial reign of Jesus that is mentioned in Revelation chapter 20. There are some who take this as being a figurative time period, and would thus say that we are currently living in the millennial reign of Jesus *now*, as Jesus reigns in the lives of Christians who have surrendered to Him, and therefore we as Christians have a heavy responsibility to make this world as much like Heaven as possible.

Others would agree that yes, we *do* have a responsibility as Christians to make this world as much like Heaven as possible, but while that is true, here in Revelation the language seems to convey a *specific* time period that is still coming, that takes place *after* Jesus returns. But even among these, the viewpoints differ with some seeing this millennial reign as being a time of prosperity focused on the earthly kingdom of Israel, while others with a more traditional view see this time period focused on all those who have placed their faith in Jesus, regardless of what nation they are from. I've even heard some speculate that this period of time is only for the Christians who died during the tribulation. There is definitely some mystery to it. Let's reread the passage from last week, let's remind ourselves of what it says, and then we'll try to work through the verses that follow in order to gain some insight into what things might look like in these days that the Bible is describing. **Revelation 20:1-6...**

Ok, so the angel will take Satan and lock him up for 1000 years, and during that time period the nations will *not* be deceived by him. I could be wrong, but it seems to me that we're not yet living in this time period- because right now it would seem that Satan is still very much in control of and is still very much involved in deceiving the nations of the world; but then again, maybe I'm wrong and what we are seeing today is just demonic influence in the world, and the true effects of Satan's release are still yet to be seen. I'm open to considering both views. The passage then describes Christians coming back to life, being resurrected so that they can live with Jesus for this 1000 year period. Here's another place it's a little awkward to assume we're already in this 1000 year period- I don't think there have been any mass resurrections that have taken place since Jesus' time, but I think defenders of this viewpoint would say that this

idea of resurrection is to be taken figuratively and they understand it to mean just a general spiritual resurrection in the lives of Jesus followers, which might be a little hard to defend alongside believing there is literally a real resurrection that Jesus promises. But either way, it specifically says that those who are a part of this first resurrection, are blessed and holy, and that the 2nd death has no power over them. So not only are there 2 resurrections, but there are 2 different deaths. A first death- presumably the death that we know of in this life, and then a second death that takes place for those who are not part of the first resurrection- which we will see later in verse 14- this second death is defined as the Lake of Fire. Then in verse 5, there's a pretty big clue that might help us better understand the main passage we'll be focusing on this morning, it says that the rest of the dead, presumably those who were *not* followers of Jesus, they won't be resurrected until after 1000 years. This second resurrection of *unbelievers* takes place 1000 years after the first resurrection of *believers*. That understanding would be the most straight forward, literal reading of what is written.

Jesus describes this idea of two different resurrections in **John 5:28-29**, He says *"Do not be amazed at this; for a time is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, 29 and will come out: those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the bad deeds to a resurrection of judgment."* So Jesus says there are 2 resurrections- a resurrection of life, and a resurrection of judgment. 1 Corinthians 15 seems to also point towards a sequence of resurrections, and it follows the progression of the book of Revelation quite nicely- 1 Corinthians 15 mentions the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a "first fruit," then a resurrection of those at Christ's coming, then a Kingdom reign, and then lastly the enemies of Jesus are dealt with.

Ok, with this foundation laid, let's go ahead and read the first part of this morning's passage, and see if we can put together some of the moving pieces here and come to some sort of loose understanding of at least what interpretation options we have to try to make sense of all this. **Revelation 20:7-10...**

Ok, so you have this Kingdom reign of Jesus on earth with just believers- those who take part in the first resurrection. Satan is locked away in prison- life is good, there seems to be this idea of redeeming and modeling what things should have and could have looked like on earth under the rule of God without the

presence of evil and without the presence of those who do evil. So in verses 7 and 8 that we just read, it says that after this 1000 year time period of goodness, Satan is then released and Satan goes out to deceive the nations. Now, one would have to wonder, who will Satan be deceiving, what nations will Satan be deceiving, if the only nation ruling on earth is the kingdom nation of resurrected, transformed Jesus followers?

Well, it's a bit mysterious and we don't have all the details spelled out very clear for us, but I think the key to answering that question is the clue I mentioned from verse 5- *"The rest of the dead [unbelievers] did not come to life until the thousand years were completed."* Verse 7 then tells us that it's now talking about the time *after* that thousand years, and so what should we thus assume based on what verse 5 says? *That at this time the rest of the dead [all the unbelievers from all time] will have come back to life*, and it would thus make sense that *they* are the ones in verse 8 who will be deceived and gathered for war (again!) against Jesus. The language from chapter 19 until now seems to convey this progression: Jesus returns to earth, and slays all those who have rejected Him (unbelievers) who have gathered together for war against Him. Only the dead *believers* are raised and transformed into eternal bodies (and we can insert from other New Testament passages that believers still *alive* at this time will be raised and transformed as well) -and together these believers from all of history will live on the earth as eternal beings with Jesus in a good Kingdom void of Satan's bad influence, for 1000 years.

Then at the end of that 1000 years, all the *unbelievers* from all of history, will be resurrected as eternal beings, and will be gathered together a 2nd time, this time as *eternal* beings, to fight against Jesus and against the eternal being *believers* living in His Kingdom. And as was the case before, Jesus alone will defeat them. He will defeat them when they are in earthly physical bodies (Armageddon), and He'll defeat them again with eternal finality when they are in resurrected eternal bodies (Gog and Magog). And this seems to be the final act of God's judgement against those who reject Him- they are consumed in heavenly fire. Verse 10 tells us that Satan will then be thrown into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet are also, where they will be tormented eternally. And before we keep moving, here's just a quick note on Gog and Magog- these names are mentioned in the book of Ezekiel, Gog is referred to as an individual leader- a prince, and Magog is his land, and they are referred to

prophetically in Ezekiel- there it is foretold that they will come up against Israel and be defeated by God. And there all all kinds of ideas as to *who* is being referred to there in the book of Ezekiel, the historical people of Magog assumptions range from those who lived in what is now modern day Ukraine, Russia, or Mongolia, or the “Stan” countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan, or the Huns, or the Vikings; and then interpretations vary as to if this is referring to something that has now already happened in history, or if it’s only referring to the future event described in Revelation, or if it’s a “both and situation,” a dual prophecy type of thing. Personally I don’t think we have enough scriptural clues to give us too much confidence in taking any hard stance on the who, what, when, where, how and why of “Gog and Magog,” but maybe there is something in scripture I have yet to notice that one day I’ll see and at that time I’ll have some more insight on this reference. Ok, let’s keep reading through the end of the chapter, and we’ll muddy the waters even a little bit further... **(verses 11-15)**

What we’re reading here, what seems to make the most sense to me personally, is to understand this as basically a rehash of what we’ve already read. This seems to be describing what we’ve just read in verses 7-10, just using different words. I might be wrong, but it seems to me that these verses 11-15 are to be laced together with verses 7-10, and not to be viewed as describing 2 different sequential events. Verse 11-15 seem to just be explaining in further detail the spiritual significance of what John has just witnessed occurring in verses 7-10. This seems to be common in the book of Revelation, John sees in his vision something happening, and then immediately afterwards that event and significance is described in further detail.

If that is the case here, the understanding would be that those who are deceived and gathered together in the first passage, are the dead ones being described in the second passage who have been raised up from Death and Hades. The fire coming down from heaven to devour in the first passage is the judgment of not being named in the book of life from the second passage. That’s the only way it seems to make sense to me logically, again I could be wrong, but that’s the way I’ve personally processed what is being mysteriously, cryptically described.

Verse 14 describes the second death- the lake of fire- and that is the destination of Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and all whose names are not

found in the book of life. There have been a few references to this book of life already in Revelation- **chapter 13 verse 8** states that all will worship the beast with exception to those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life; **chapter 3 verse 5** says that those who overcome will not be erased from the book of life- but this concept of names written in a book and life actions recorded in a book that God has, is scattered throughout the Old and New Testament.

Exodus 32:32-33 mentions God telling Moses that those who turn away from Him will be wiped out from His book, **Daniel 12:1** speaks of salvation for those of Israel whose names are written in the book, there are places in the Psalms that mention a book pre-recording the days of one's life- even before being formed in the womb (Psalm 139:16), Paul mentions the book of life in Philippians 4:3- the idea is that nothing goes unnoticed, God has perfect record keeping skills, and He even pre-records things in His book based on His perfect knowledge of future events and future decisions in the lives of mankind.

Here in Revelation 20, verse 12, there is specifically mentioned multiple *books* (plural) in addition to the Book of Life- and it seems like the idea is that there are books in God's dwelling place that have in them the documented record of everyone's life actions- good and bad. And here at the Great White Throne Judgment, these books are opened, reviewed, analyzed, and judgement is served for everyone according to their life's action- unless their name is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. We don't know for sure, but it seems to me that maybe the believers aren't even present here, they've already been resurrected and have reigned with Jesus for 1000 years, they've been recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life, they're good- the focus here seems to be more on those NOT written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and these are thus being called into account, they will have to stand trial before God Almighty, not having the forgiveness protection offered through Jesus.

The message throughout the Bible is that all our actions are recorded, and there is enough of a case against every single one of us for doing wrong things, for setting ourselves up against a perfect Creator God. We are all unfit for a perfect world where God dwells, and thus will be separated out from God's installment of that perfect world. But the work of Jesus is that He lived the perfect life pleasing to God for us- so that when we chose to receive Him into our lives and follow Him, God sees *His* perfect life instead of our imperfect life, and the

account thus reflects that we *are* fit for the perfect world God is installing. It's like we all owe a debt to God according to the books, and the time will come to collect that debt, but Jesus says for those who ask Him to take control of their life decisions, that'll He'll cover the debt. So when the time comes to collect that debt, those who received the accounting of Jesus will have their debt marked out in a different book that says Jesus has paid it. It's a pretty amazing thing for us *not* to have our whole life's bad decisions held against us, right?

Ok, so let's think a little bit about this lake of fire, described as the second death. It was mentioned back in **chapter 19, verse 20**, telling us that the beast and false prophet will be thrown alive into the lake of fire, but this concept of judgement fire is also one that is present in other places in scripture. Jesus in Matthew 25 speaks of the "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" and that those who reject Him will also experience that fire. In that same passage, Jesus also describes this fire as "eternal punishment." Another reference is found in Mark 9, Jesus states that it's better to cut off whatever is causing you to sin than to leave it and it cause you to enter into hell, the "unquenchable fire." Now, this subject of judgment, lake of fire, fires of Hell has been historically yet another place where sincere followers of Jesus have had different understandings, and I'm going to outline for you the 3 primary views that are each very different, but all three do have scriptural support.

First off, the view that is probably currently the most popular, is the idea that Hell, the Lake of Fire, is a place of eternal torment and suffering. In other words, those raised back to life after the 1000 years, the *unbelievers* who will be raised back as eternal beings, they will gather against Jesus and His followers, and then will be judged by the books and God's fire, thrown into the Lake of Fire alive to be tormented by hot flames day and night for all eternity. I mentioned a couple weeks ago the passage in Luke 16 concerning the rich man and poor Lazarus, and that the way Jesus describes it (at least *before* the Great White Throne happens) is that there is a place of hot torment and a place of cool comfort after one passes from this life. Now that situation could very well be different *after* the Great White Throne Judgment, the Luke passage could be describing a different scene than the coming future Lake of Fire, as we'll consider in a moment, but that's one passage that might give this viewpoint of eternal suffering some validity. Another verse would be the one we just read, verse 10 here in chapter 20- at the very least, the devil, the beast, and the false prophet will be tormented

day and night forever, and so it could be assumed that others thrown into the Lake of Fire would experience the same eternal torment.

Another view, termed as Annihilationism, that also holds historical and scriptural validity, is the idea that the Lake of Fire judgement is final, and is descriptive of a true 2nd death in which those being judged are completely annihilated, ceasing to exist. In other words, when the *unbelievers* are raised back to life after the 1000 year reign, they'll get that one final moment showdown against Jesus and will then be permanently exterminated in God's judgment- they will experience a 2nd death that is final, they will cease to be conscious eternal beings, and will be totally burned up in the Lake of Fire, never to be seen again. Those who lean towards this understanding would say that the fires are eternal- everlasting, but the suffering is not. They would contend that there is currently a holding place Hell, Ghenna, Sheol place of torment, but that in the final Lake of Fire judgement, it will truly be a second death as is mentioned here in chapter 20 verse 14, a death that is final and eternal- eternal not as in suffering eternally, but the decision, the judgement, the fate is sealed and eternal. This view would look at verse 10 here and say that the devil, the beast, and the false prophet are different than humans, as in they are demonic/fallen angel beings that, like God, are eternal in nature and it would be impossible for them to cease to exist, therefore *they* would have to remain alive in some holding place of torture- unlike human beings whose soul make up is different and whose souls *can* be extinguished. Those holding this view would argue that this would seem to be the more straight forward reading of scripture, and that it would seem to be a little more consistent with the character of a merciful God.

Lastly, probably currently the least popular view, yet one that several early church fathers seemed to lean towards, is the idea of Universalism. Now this is different than Unitarian Universalism, those who attend UU meetings prefer *not* to define any particular theological ideas, in contrast, just the term *Universalism* defines the Lake of Fire, Hell fire Judgment, as not being an eternal ongoing torture- but rather as a *refining* fire, that burns off sin and death, so that even those who rejected Jesus in this life will eventually, ultimately, *universally* be saved- redeemed, re-habilitated, and received into the New Jerusalem Heaven that is described in the next chapter of Revelation. The idea is that sin will be burned away, sin will cease to exist and these will no longer be deceived by evil- and without the influence of evil in the world, they will ultimately have the

opportunity to surrender to Jesus in the eternal life and live redeemed in His Kingdom, as a result of His great mercy. This view probably gets the most pushback, but proponents of this view would argue that this view seems to align most with God's plan to redeem ALL of creation. Some of the texts used to backup this view would be **1 Corinthians 15:22** *"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."* Or Colossians 1:20 that speaks of *all things* being reconciled to God since Jesus made peace through the blood of the cross, or **John 12:32** where Jesus states that He will draw *all people* to Himself. **1 Timothy 4:10** states that God is the *"Savior of all mankind, especially of believers."* And there are many other verses that use the word "all" when talking about the redemptive work of Jesus. The idea would be that Jesus' work on the cross covered all sins for all time, and that not only those who recognize His work will be saved, but that eventually even those who did *not* recognize His work will eventually recognize it, and be saved as well. *"At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:10-11) While Universalism probably gets labeled as heresy amongst some groups, and it seems to rub a little with the tone and language set here in Revelation chapter 20- despite that, the idea is intriguing, and there are lots of verses that would seem to give this viewpoint traction, and for sure it would absolutely be amazing if God decided to do such a miraculous, merciful, redemptive work.

Hopefully I've given you some concepts to wrestle with this morning, as you go home and continue to consider what is written in this complex book of Revelation. But here's what I want you to do before I pray for us, and before we leave. This might seem odd, but I want everyone to right now look around and try to make eye contact with as many people as you can in 10 seconds, look forward, look beside you, behind you- starting now- you have 10 seconds- Go!

Ok, what I want you to realize is that you just made eye contact with several people who more than likely have a different understanding on some particular Biblical concept or *concepts* than you do. Concepts like Predestination and Freewill; or Dispensationalism and Replacement Theology; Pre-trib, mid-trib, and post-trib rapture; pre-millennial and post-millennial rapture; Eternal Torment, Annihilation, and Universalism; etc. And that person, that you made eye contact

with, probably has some scriptures that they cling to that has lead them to their viewpoint, that is different than yours.

What I want to emphasize to you, is that this is really a beautiful, healthy thing to have in a church this size. A lot of churches don't have the opportunity to rub shoulders with people who offer a different perspective based in God's word. A lot of places offer only an echo chamber where only their particular bias is confirmed. Now, we're *not* a church that encourages everyone to believe just whatever they want to believe, but the idea is rather that we are here to place ourselves under the authority and standard of God's word, and so with every subject that might have differing viewpoints, we are committing to look to God's word for answers and guidance, to be diligent yet humble students in our study of the Bible, and attempt to consider how to harmonize verses in the Bible that at first glance might seem to be in conflict with each other, that could lead to differing viewpoints. Somehow it's all true, it all fits together in perfect harmony, God is consistent in His character and nature- and part of my heart's desire for One Church is that we would have the maturity, the willingness, and the humility to grow together and wrestle together with scripture through the subjects and issues that other Christians chose to find offense in and divide over. If that sounds good to you, then join me in your heart as I offer a prayer for us all to do just that.