

FUTUREWORLD pt.9 3-16-14

“THE MILLENIUM” pt.1

(Revelation 20) We continue today our look at the future which God has planned for His creation. Much like last week, we will look at a number of different Scriptures and apply ourselves to some rather intense study of God’s word in an attempt to answer the famous millennial question. By that I mean we will seek to ascertain from Scripture what is true about the promise of a 1000 year period of Satan-restricted Christian dominance in the earth. Before we get into the word I need to tell you a story about a preacher who was visiting San Francisco and went on a run across the magnificent Golden Gate Bridge. (I told this a year ago, so pardon me if you have heard it.) Anyway, as the preacher was running across the bridge he noticed a man who looked extremely distraught begin to pull himself over the side of the bridge as if to leap from the bridge to his death. This preacher figured he had better act quickly to save this fellow so he said, *“Stop, don’t jump! You don’t want to kill yourself do you?”* The distraught man replied, *“Why not? I have nothing to live for.”* The preacher said, *“Oh, I bet you do. Tell me, are you a Christian?”* The man said that yes, in fact, he was a Christian. *“Really, I’m a Christian too,”* said the preacher, *“What franchise are you with?”* *“Well, Baptist”* replied the depressed fellow. *“Really,”* said the preacher, *“what a coincidence, I’m a Baptist too. Tell me are you Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?”* He said, *“Northern Baptist.”* *Wow, how about that? I’m a Northern Baptist too. But are you Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?”* The fellow said he was a Northern Conservative Baptist. *“Tremendous!”* said the preacher, *“Are you a Northern Conservative Reformed Baptist or Northern Conservative Fundamental Baptist?”* Our depressed friend responded that he was a Northern Conservative Fundamental Baptist. *“This is really extraordinary”* said the preacher. *“I too am a Northern Conservative Fundamental Baptist. Isn’t it amazing that two people like us would meet here in San Francisco on the Golden Gate Bridge! But tell me now, are you a Northern Conservative Fundamental Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Atlantic region?”* The man said that he was a Northern Conservative Fundamental Baptist Great Lakes Region. *“Phenomenal!”* said the preacher. *“That’s my group too. This is absolutely a miracle that we would meet like this. But tell me one more thing. Are you Northern Conservative Fundamental Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1872 or Council of 1912?”* This time the man on the bridge said, *“I am Northern Conservative Fundamental Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912.”* When the preacher heard that he said, *“What?! 1912? Die heretic!”* And he pushed him off the bridge.

Now that story is designed to dramatize a negative tendency among Christians in this nation. It is a tendency to stand against anyone who disagrees with me or my group regardless of how much agreement there may be on more important matters. I hope you purpose not to be like that. I hope we can love and respect one another in Christ even though we may not see the Scriptures the same way. The things I am dealing with over these middle weeks of our study of the future are things well-meaning, Bible-loving Christians have debated for many years. They are not matters which strike at the core of what we believe. Your convictions about the end-times may be different from mine but I'm not about to push you over the bridge because of it. What's more I'm not going to back away from my Biblically-informed convictions just because you want to push me off the bridge. I may not treat these things as Scriptural fundamentals but I haven't said they aren't of any importance. Some people, either thru a distaste for controversy, or a distaste for hard thinking and study, have decided to turn their minds off when eschatology, or the doctrine of last things, is brought up. That attitude no more honors the Lord than does a contentious dogmatism. Let's be kind in our studies, but let's also be studious in our kindness.

Revelation 20 tells us about a period that has come to be called *the millennium*. It refers to a 1000 year period and when used by Christians it normally means the period described in this chapter, a period marked by the rule of Christ and the binding of Satan. **1-4** *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. 4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.* What is this passage talking about, and when is the 1000 years? We will get to that in the course of our study. But to set the stage for our look into Scripture I need to present to you the various views of the millennium which are held by Bible-believers in our day. On your Scripture sheet you will find a list with definitions. You can divide these in various ways, but for starters let's note that some people say that this millennial reign of Jesus occurs before His second coming, and others say it happens after His second coming. If you

believe Jesus is coming back before the millennium you are a premillennialist, or a pre-mil for short. If you believe that Jesus is returning after the millennium you are post-mil. That's easy to understand isn't it? But there are two types of pre-mils and two types of post-mils. Among pre-mils there are dispensational pre-mils and historic pre-mils. I can't go into much detail here, but suffice it to say that dispensational premillennialism is a recent development, and teaches the things we talked about last week, that the coming of Jesus and the rapture of the church occurs seven years prior to the millennium. Historic pre-mils have been around since the early church and they believe that Jesus will return to earth much as I described it last week except that He will inaugurate a 1000 year earthly, political kingdom prior to the judgment of unbelievers and the beginning of the eternal realm.

The post-mil people may also be divided into two camps. The first group known as post-mils are those who are looking for a future golden age of Christianity when the world will be essentially Christianized. The second group is known as a-millennialists. Amillennialists, or a-mils, believe we are presently in the millennium and that the rule of Christ finds its expression in the hearts and churches of believers, but does not hold out a promise of a future historical subduing of earthly kingdoms. Neither a-mils or post-mils believe the millennium must be exactly 1000 years as do the premillennialists. Relatively speaking, a-mils and post-mils are very much alike. In addition, I should be quick to note that within each of these groups you may find significant variations in belief. Two other popular views are: #1 the pan-mil view which teaches that whatever group is right it will all pan out in the end; and #2 the general mil view for those generally confused by it all. I hope to help clear away some confusion for many of you today. In doing so, I feel greatly constrained by the restrictions of this setting. I don't have much time, nor do I have the proper audience for going into great detail. For those interested in further study I commend to you two books. One entitled *The Momentous Event* by WJ Grier, and the other, *The Bible and the Future* by Anthony Hoekema. You should know up front that Dan Hendley was taught none of these views as I grew up and developed my convictions. It wasn't until after I finished seminary that I took the time to seriously study. The more I studied the more convinced I became of the Amil position. That is where you will find me. I have a great appreciation for the arguments of those who differ with me and I invite you to read what they say. But, from this preacher you will hear Amillennialism taught because I am persuaded it is the view most consistent with the Bible.

The 20th chapter of Revelation is clearly a very important passage to look at on this subject and we will do that but we will look at it later in our study as we examine six reasons why we should not expect a future millennial kingdom. Reason #1 is that the Bible clearly teaches that the resurrection and judgment of believers and unbelievers is one event which occurs at the time of Christ's return. Premillennialism teaches that the believers are raised and judged at the time of Christ's coming but unbelievers are raised and judged at the end of the millennium. But again, the Bible clearly teaches that the resurrection and judgment of believers and unbelievers is one event which occurs at the return of Christ. I spent considerable time last week demonstrating to you from God's word that this is so. The primary passages that we looked at were John 5:28-29 which indicates that all will be raised at the same time, I Corinthians 15 which says the resurrection of the righteous will be at the last trumpet, Matthew 13 and Matthew 25 which depict judgment scenes, both portraying Christ judging saints and sinners, sheep and goats at the same time, and doing so upon His return. II Thessalonians chapter 1 tells us that when Christ comes He will give relief to us by defeating and condemning the enemies of the gospel. All of these passages stand in bold contrast to the notion that the judgment and punishment of the unsaved will be 1000 years after the coming of Jesus and the judging of the saints. To me this is the strongest objection I have to the premil understanding, but since I dealt with it at length last week I will move on past it today.

A second reason why we should not expect a future millennial kingdom is that the earthly millennial reign it foresees is inconsistent with the New Testament teaching about the last days and the age to come.® To explain: The expression "last days" is very often used to refer to the entire gospel age in which we now live. Hebrews 1:2 for example, says: "In these last days God has spoken to us in His Son..." See also Acts 2:17, James 5:3, I Peter 1:20 and I John 2:18. JM Ghysels remarks, "It is not open to doubt that, according to Scripture, with the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit, the last period of the world's history has begun. This present period in which we live is the last on the divine program. If this present period is the last then there remains nothing but the eternal state; there is no place left for a millennial age between. (Ghysels quote on Grier p.53) And, in fact, as you read the New Testament it is obvious that only two ages are envisioned: this present age and the "age to come" which refers to the eternal state. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:21 that Christ is enthroned 21 *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.* Under the expressions "this age" and "the one to come" the apostle groups all time, present and future.

Jesus Himself used similar language. Luke 18:**29-30** *He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."* But Jesus, what about the millennium? Don't forget that. But Jesus always forgot that. Jesus never hinted at such an intermediate age. Premillennialism maintains that there are three ages: the present age, the millennium and the eternal state. But the New Testament affirms only two. Matthew 12:**32** *Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.* Luke 20:**34-36a** *Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; 36 for they cannot even die anymore.* This is the language of the entire New Testament. There is this age and there is the one to come and the dividing line between the two is the second coming of Jesus.

A third reason why we should not expect a future millennial kingdom is that the return of the glorified Christ and of glorified believers to an earth where sin and death still exist would violate the finality of their glorification. My pre-mil brother envisions this period in which you will find Jesus physically present among men, the resurrected saints, the unbelievers who are alive when Christ comes and who knows whom else because premillennial teachers are rather divided over who will actually live in the millennium. But I have to ask, why should believers, who have been enjoying heavenly glory be raised from the dead in order to return to an earth where sin and death still reign? Are not glorified, resurrection bodies designed for a new earth, from which all remnants of sin and the curse have been banished? Why should Christ have to once again descend to an earth where there are those opposed to His rule? Really, the whole idea of it is very strange to consider. Lorraine Boettner writes, "the idea of a provisional kingdom in which glorified saints and mortal men mingle finds no support anywhere in Scripture. When the saints are caught up to meet the Lord in the air it is said, *"So shall we ever be with the Lord."* There is no hint of coming back to the earth before the time of the new heavens and the new earth of the eternal state." (Boettner p.298-299) Hendrikus Berkhof raises the question as to how it will be that sinners and saints still in the flesh will be able to stand in the presence of the glorified Christ? Do you remember how John responded when he encountered the glorified Jesus? Revelation 1:**17ab** *When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man.* And yet we are told that unconverted people will live in Christ's glorious presence for

1000 years and even have the nerve to rebel against Him? These are things hard to understand and unwarranted from Scripture.

A fourth reason why we should not expect a future millennial kingdom is that there is no apparent reason for a 1000 year reign of Jesus on an improved but not renewed earth which would come between this age and the eternal age. This objection, in itself, is not conclusive but should make us examine carefully the millennial teaching.

A fifth reason why we should not expect a future millennial reign of Jesus prior to the end is that there is no indication of it anywhere outside Revelation 20. Now, I'm not saying the Bible has to tell me something more than once for me to believe it. Don't hear me say that. But do hear me say this: when an idea as colossal as the millennium is only found once in the Bible, and when that idea conflicts with many plain sayings of Scripture, and when that idea presents many strange implications, and when that idea has no obvious purpose behind it, you had better make very sure that one passage teaches clearly that idea. In short, I am hard-pressed to believe that God has a 1000 year intermediate age scheduled on his prophetic timetable and He only chose to mention it one time in the entire Bible. Oh, yes, our premillennial friends suggest that there are references to the 1000 years all over, but apart from Revelation 20 you would have never heard of a millennium. It is a one-text doctrine and even George Ladd, the most respected proponent of premillennialism in my lifetime admits that were it not for Revelation 20 he would be a-mil. That is an awful lot of weight to put on one passage of Scripture and I am convinced that the pre-mil interpretation cannot bear that weight. Reason #6 why we should not expect a future millennial kingdom is because Revelation 20 does not demand it.

In the time we have left we will look at Revelation 20. Premillennialism sees in Revelation 19 an account of the second coming. 19:3 speaks of Christ judging the great harlot. Verses 6 and 7 celebrate the reign of God and the marriage of the Lamb. I agree with the premil understanding that this material in chapter 19 is a description of Christ's coming and final judgment. Then we come to Revelation 20, which I will explain to you now from a premil perspective. Again, my commentary over the next few minutes is not my own, but that of the premillennial school 1-3 *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these*

things he must be released for a short time. There you have the binding of Satan. He is bound so that he can't deceive the nations again, such as he did thru the anti-Christ, or the man of lawlessness. At the end of the 1000 years you see that Satan is unbound so that he may lead a revolt against Jesus. **4** *Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.* These then are the saints who are resurrected at the coming of Jesus. They are reunited with their souls and are privileged to reign with Jesus in the millennial age. **5a** *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.* This is parenthetical and refers to the unsaved who are raised and judged after the 1000 years. **5b** *This is the first resurrection.* This refers back to verse 4 and the raising of the saints. **6** *Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.* Not much is said about this period of time except that Satan is bound and the resurrected saints are reigning with Christ. **7-15** *When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. 9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.* In these verses we see that there is an attempted overthrow of Christ's rule which will be quickly incinerated. Following this we have judgment and

eternal states established. Does that look like a reasonable understanding of Revelation 20 to you? Sure it does. It looks fine to me until I begin to think about how it fits in with the rest of Scripture. I am puzzled that nowhere else is this taught or hinted at in Scripture. I am left wondering about this strange state foretold here that involves heavenly beings co-mingling with earthlings and sinners, that involves sinful men seeing Jesus in all His glory but still not falling down before Him in worship or terror. I am perplexed over how this fits in with the Biblical distinctions of this age and the one to come. Is it this age? Is it the eternal age? Is it part one part the other? How come no other New Testament texts talk about this? I remember what is taught so many places about the finality of Christ's coming, the singular raising and judging of all men, the final judgment which comes when Christ comes in glory. I see how inconsistent this is with the rest of the New Testament and so I ask, "*Is there another way to interpret this passage that fits better with the rest of Scripture?*" And guess what my answer is? *Yes, there certainly is.* Based upon the words of Revelation 20 alone the pre-mil view is fine. But a chief rule of Biblical interpretation is that you interpret one passage of Scripture by the rest of Scripture. Scripture interprets Scripture. And especially you interpret the less clear by the more clear. Make sense? Let me show you how that works on another subject.

Look at James 2:24 *You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.* How shall we understand that? Does that mean that our standing before God, our judicial position depends on our own good deeds? You might conclude that from reading this verse alone wouldn't you? But now let's allow other Scriptures to help us. What does the rest of the New Testament tell us about justification? Romans 3:28 *We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.* Romans 4 goes into detail on this matter and concludes that justification comes by faith alone apart from any works. And is that the only place this is taught? Why no? Jesus said, "*He who believes in me has eternal life.*" The book of Galatians, like Romans, makes this point clear. Ephesians 2, Philippians 3 and many other passages teach justification by faith alone apart from works. So, when we read James 2:24 we need to ask, "*Since God doesn't contradict Himself, is there another way to understand this?*" And indeed there is. The word for "justify" can mean not only "to declare one righteous" but can also mean "to prove one to be righteous." In Romans the context tells you it means the former, in James the latter. We must let Scripture interpret Scripture. That is what I believe the amil and post-mil interpretations of Revelation 20 do. How do we post-mil types handle this chapter? We believe that the 1000 year period in which Satan is bound and

Christ is ruling with His saints has already come and is continuing now. The term A-mil literally means “no millennium” but that is not an apt description of the position. A preferred term is “*realized millennium*” because it indicates that we are not denying the millennial teaching but that we see its fulfillment, not in a day out there in the future, but right now. In the first coming of Christ Satan was bound. In the ascension of Jesus He began to reign. Obviously, this understanding has to take the 1000 years figuratively since already it has lasted almost 2000 years. But I am convinced that the amil option is superior to the premil view because it does greater justice to the rest of Scripture. It interprets this difficult passage in the light of those that are more plain in their meaning. And next week I will offer you an alternative understanding of Revelation 20 that I hope you will appreciate.