

## FUTUREWORLD pt.10 3-23-14

### *“The Millennium pt.2”*

(Revelation 20) Most of us, I expect, do not normally read the instructions that come with various purchases that we make. We usually figure things out on our own, but for those who do read the instructions, there are occasions for a chuckle or two. Here are some actual product instructions: On the package of a Rowenta iron it says, “Do not iron clothes on body.” On children’s cough medicine it says, “Do not drive or operate machinery.” On a hotel-provided shower cap it says and I quote, “Fits one head.” On Nytol, the sleep aid, it says, “Warning: may cause drowsiness.” Directions for a bar of Dial soap. Can you imagine? Directions for a bar of soap? It says, “Use like regular soap.” And finally, on a Korean kitchen knife, “Warning: keep out of children.” There is some good advice. Now, if I were to put an instruction label on today’s sermon it may say, “Hear in conjunction with previous messages in series.” Unfortunately, for you who haven’t been here this is one of those studies that sort of depends on what has gone before. CDs can be purchased to help out. You could also listen online. But we do need some review. Today we look at the Millennium part two. Last week we began to discuss what the Scriptures teach about the 1000 years spoken of in Revelation 20. After giving you an overview of the four major millennial views found among Bible-loving Christians in our day I went on to show from Scripture why we should not expect a future millennial, or thousand-year, reign of Jesus and his saints over the earth. The six reasons offered were: (1) The Scriptures teach, contrary to the Premillennial perspective, that both the saved and the unsaved will be raised and judged at the coming of Jesus. (2) The second reason why we should not expect a future millennial kingdom is that the Bible teaches repeatedly that we are currently in the last days and the only age after us is eternal. God’s word tells us about this age and the age to come but never mentions a millennium in between. (3) The third reason why we should not expect a future millennial kingdom is that a return to earth of a glorified Christ and glorified believers compromises the finality of their glorification. (4) Reason four is that there is no apparent purpose for a 1000 year intermediate kingdom. (5) Reason five why we should not expect a future millennial kingdom is that the idea of a 1000 year provisional kingdom is mentioned nowhere in Scripture outside of Revelation 20. (6) And reason six is that Revelation 20 does not demand a premillennial understanding. You may recall that I referred to

premillennialism as a one-text doctrine. Let me repeat what I said last week. When an idea as great 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 then you had better make very sure that one passage teaches clearly that idea. Some premillennial brethren are persuaded that Revelation 20 does clearly teach that view. I am persuaded it does not clearly teach it, that there are other understandings of this chapter that make better sense in the light of what we find elsewhere in the Bible. Last week I offered you the premil interpretation of Revelation 20. I said that it was a fine interpretation based solely on the wording of this chapter, but when you use other Scripture to shed light on this chapter and assist us in understanding it then you reach very different conclusions.

So, today I will offer an alternative interpretation of Revelation 20 that better fits what we read in the other parts of God's word. Before I even read this chapter though I must deal with chapter 19. Premillennialism argues that the 1000 years of chapter 20 must follow the second coming because chapter 19 describes certain elements of the return of Christ. I am agreed that chapter 19 includes certain elements of Christ's return. There is judgment and celebration and the marriage of the Lamb. That is second coming stuff, no doubt, but I don't conclude that the events of chapter 20 follow the events of chapter 19 in time. The book of Revelation does not present for us a continual chronology of end time events. It is not that simple. In fact, I'd like to suggest that the book of Revelation is actually pretty difficult to understand. The basic theme of it isn't. The overarching theme is simply that Jesus is going to win and His people with Him. In that respect it is a glorious book and I love to read it because it builds me up in faith, but the particular parts of Revelation and some of its specific messages are hard. About 25 years ago I went away for a week to a place that had a good theological library to study the book of Revelation. I read commentaries on the book written by fine Christian authors who differed in interpretation. I left that week of study knowing the content of Revelation much better. I also understood the questions it raised, but I certainly didn't come home feeling I had all the answers. Far from it. None of the interpretations I encountered, and you can see various positions described for you on the outline page. None of these completely satisfied me. The one that came closest was the perspective of William Hendriksen who teaches a view called progressive parallelism. Rather than seeing the book as a continuous chronicle of future events

Hendriksen distinguishes seven sections to the book, with each section giving the reader particular insights about the entire gospel dispensation from Christ's birth to the end. This made good sense to me because I saw how the same themes were repeated in different ways throughout the book. I saw how the birth of Christ is mentioned in Chapter 12, hardly where it would fit chronologically. I saw that the exaltation of Jesus and the consummation of His kingdom is described in chapter 11 and then again in chapter 19 and then again in chapters 20-22. It appears that Revelation does repeat the same themes in different ways over the progression of the book. The sixth division, Hendriksen locates as running from chapter 17-19, and the last goes from Revelation 20 to 22 which means that there is no chronological connection between chapter 19 and chapter 20. They follow each other on the page but not in history. Let me offer one example of this same kind of situation elsewhere in Revelation. The connection between chapter 19 and chapter 20 is similar to that between chapters 11 and 12. Revelation 11:**18** *The nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.* There we read of judgment. The end has arrived. Yet in Revelation 12 we are taken back to the beginning of the New Testament period for Revelation 12:5 describes the birth, ascension and coronation of our Lord 12:**5** *She gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.* You can see from that example that we are not dealing with a chronology of the future when we read this great book. This will make more sense to you as we go thru chapter 20 and explain its parts.

**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. 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.* Here we read of the 1000 year binding of Satan. What

does this involve and when does it happen? One important issue is whether or not the 1000 years is a literal term or a figurative one. Everyone will agree, I hope, that not every number in the Bible is to be taken literally. When Jesus says to forgive your brother 70 x 7 does He mean that on the 491<sup>st</sup> offense you can go after him? Of course not. The number 7 represents perfection and the point of Christ's words is that you just keep on forgiving - it is a figurative number. But how do you know when a number is figurative and when it is not? Well, one way is to look at the context and the style of literature in which we find it. And the style of literature in the book of Revelation is called *apocalyptic*, a form of literature marked by the extensive use of figures and symbols. Just read this book and I think you'll see what I mean. It is not historical narrative. It is a vision and it is certainly reasonable to expect that the numbers used in this book, just like the animals, are not literal but symbolic. The number 7 is symbolic of perfection in quality. The number 10 contains the idea of fullness of quantity or many-ness. 1000 being ten to the third power may symbolize a long, long time. It need not be taken literally. Psalm 50:10 says God owns the cattle on what? 1000 hills. Do you take that literally? Does hill 1001 belong to someone else? No, all admit that the 1000 is not literal there. And to be fair all should admit the possibility that it is not literal here. It is my conviction that it cannot be literal since what it refers to is the entire gospel age which has continued now for over 1900 years. And has Satan been bound all this time? Absolutely. Let's look now at what is meant by the binding of Satan.

On the surface it seems clearly mistaken to say that Satan is now bound. Don't we talk about the things Satan is doing? Doesn't the New Testament tell us that he prowls about like a roaring lion? Yes, it does. There can be no argument about that. Satan is alive and active. But there can be no doubt about something else either. In the first coming of Christ Satan was defeated wasn't he? Wasn't he? Yes, he was. What did Jesus come to do? I John 3:8 says He came to destroy the works of the devil and lets read from Matthew 12 where Jesus was accused of being able to cast out demons because He was Himself Beelzebul, the chief demon. Matthew 12:**28-29** *But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.* What is Jesus talking about here? Remember the subject is the casting out of demons, the rescuing from Satan's clutches those who were held under his power.

Understanding that context, who is the strong man and who is the plunderer? The One who

plunders is Jesus who takes away that which belonged to Satan and He does so after having first bound, and the word here is the same you find in Revelation 20, having first bound the strong man who is the devil. Do you see it? Christ is telling those who have ears to hear that He is right then and there in His first coming binding the devil. Then also there is Luke 10 when the disciples come back from their missionary journeys and report on how it had gone. **17-18** *The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."* 18 *And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.* That phrase "fall from heaven" is an idiom which means to lose power and authority. Jesus is saying that He witnessed the defeat of Satan as the gospel went forth. John 12:**31-32** *Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.* All will agree that the title "ruler of this world" speaks of Satan. Jesus says He is about to be cast out and He connects that with the effectiveness of the gospel call to all men, not just Jews, but all men. On your own you may look at Colossians 2:15 which says the devil was disarmed by the cross. Hebrews 2:14 which says that Jesus rendered Satan powerless. Revelation 12:9 also speaks of the casting out of Satan. Let's look at that one. Remember the idea of progressive parallelism in Revelation The same ideas are repeated in this book. We have read of the casting down of Satan in Revelation 20 here we find it also in Revelation 12:**9** *The great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth.* According to Revelation 12 this occurs in the first coming of the Lord Jesus. The point of all these verses is to show that Satan has been bound already. His binding is not a future event but a past event. It occurred in the first coming of Jesus, in His life, death and ascension to the universal throne. Satan has been bound and beaten but that binding is not absolute and his defeat is not yet complete. Revelation 20 does not indicate that it must be. In fact, the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 indicates that he is restricted as to a particular activity, not in every way. Verse 3 of Revelation 20 says that Satan was bound with a specific purpose in mind "so that he should not deceive the nations any longer." That word "nations" has specific reference to the Gentiles, the non-Jews, and what had been their condition prior to the coming of Jesus? The Bible says they were in darkness, under the complete deception of wickedness. And one of the grand announcements of the gospel is that those who lived in darkness would see a great light, that the kingdom of God was not just for Jews but for

Gentiles. This is one of the great themes of the New Testament and one of those truths that few Christians in our day appreciate adequately. The New Testament screams out over and over again that God was doing something radical and new and hard to believe when He brought Gentiles into His kingdom right alongside the Jewish believers. Read the book of Acts and see how much controversy this created. The Jews were shocked that the gospel was received by Gentiles. They were learning that although the devil had kept the nations in sin and darkness for centuries that now his power over them had been broken. And it is precisely this that Revelation 20 envisions in the binding of Satan. He has been cast down so that Jesus might draw “all men” not just Jews but “all types of men” to Himself.

We move along now to verse **4-6** *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. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 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.* Here we read of the rule of Christ and his saints during this 1000 year period. There are three questions we need to address from these verses. Where does this reign take place? What is its character? And who participates in it?

First then, where does the reign take place? There is no mention here of Palestine or Jerusalem. It simply says the saints sat on thrones. Now, according to the entire book of Revelation, the throne of Christ is in heaven. For example, Revelation 4:**2-4** *Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. 3 And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. 4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.* And where would these 24 thrones have been? In heaven. And so also we have every reason to expect that the thrones mentioned in Revelation 20 are in heaven. This is further confirmed when we see that the ones who sat on the thrones are called “souls”. I saw the “souls” of those who had been beheaded. John sees “souls” not bodies. Now I grant that the term “soul” can mean “person” generally but not in

this case because what had happened to the bodies of these people? They had already perished. Verse 4 now presents them as disembodied souls living in the presence of Jesus in heaven. That is the *where* of the reigning saints.

Next we look at the character of this reign. We really aren't told much about it. There are indications elsewhere that believers will function as judges with Christ. They are certainly living in His presence, enjoying the glory of heaven for the duration of the 1000 years.

Our third question is: "who are they who participate in this?" Verse 4 indicates that it is any and all who have died faithful to Jesus. This group includes the martyrs certainly, but also anyone who did not sell out to the enemy. Maybe the most controversial phrase in this passage and the one of greatest difficulty for those, like me, holding to the amil or post-mil view is the phrase "they came to life." In verse 5 it says that the rest of the dead, presumably those who did not follow Christ, did not come to life until the end of the 1000 years. Everyone agrees that this coming to life of verse 5 speaks of bodily resurrection. It is the most natural reading then to assume that verse 4 also bespeaks bodily resurrection. But it cannot mean that. I say it cannot because the Scriptures teach a simultaneous bodily resurrection of the saved and unsaved. Verse 4 also cannot mean bodily resurrection since the raising of the dead bodies is mentioned in this very same chapter in verses 11-13 as something distinct from what is described here. **13** *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.* This resurrection is post-millennial and there is strong indication that it includes some who are saved and some not. So, if the first resurrection described in verse 4 is not bodily what does it refer to? Some have suggested, including Augustine back in the fifth century, that the first resurrection is the rebirth but it is probably best regarded as the translation of the souls of believers from this sinful earth to God's holy heaven where they experience "life" with Christ. According to this interpretation then the first resurrection is the deliverance of the believer from this body of death, from this mortal flesh and this sinful earth into the life of God in heavenly joy.

**7-9** *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. This then would depict the final days of the gospel era. It mentions the releasing of Satan to do what he had done for so long before Christ, i.e. deceive the Gentiles. This may relate to the work of the man of sin we read about in II Thessalonians. The result will be a great battle, whether spiritual or physical we cannot say, against the saints of God. And there will be a mighty deliverance from heaven followed by the eternal banishment of Satan and the judgment of all men. **10-15** 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.*

So, there you have an a-millennial interpretation of Revelation 20. It's not something I would give my life to defend, but in all sincerity I believe it is the view that does most justice to the plain teaching of Scripture. But when it comes to the book of Revelation the one thing I am dogmatic about is that we should approach it with humility. One result of my study is to make me suspicious of anyone who is too sure of what everything in this book means and represents. And just because it is a book hard to understand I would rather derive my convictions from the clearer portions of Scripture and see how Revelation elaborates on what we know from other places to be true.

Not everything in Revelation is so mysterious however. There are some things made very plain. As I said, the major thrust of the book is simple. Jesus is going to win. He is reigning now and it is He who will direct history to its culmination in the new heavens and the new earth. Something else is very plain from Revelation 19. We have read of judgment. We have read of the opening of the books. We have read of the coming day when every man will stand before Jesus Christ and give an account for his deeds. The image offered implies that God has a book with the record of your life written in it, every deed, every

word, every thought. This will be used in judging you and the verdict is predictable isn't it? Have you lived up to the holiness of God? Have you loved Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? Have you loved your neighbor as yourself? If the answer is *no* the verdict is *guilty* and the punishment is the lake of fire. The lake of fire. When our son was nine years old, he was big into reading the Hardy Boys mysteries and I remember, after he finished one particular book, asking him how it ended. He said, "*Just like they always do. The good guys win; these books always have a happy ending.*" But this isn't so happy is it? The lake of fire, the second death. And that will be the end of the story for you - unless, unless and what is the unless? Unless your name is written in the book of life. Verse 13 here tells us that this one special book called the book of life, was brought out with all the others and 15 *if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.* That means you had better make sure your name is written in that book. Here I have a book. It is the church directory. In here are written the names of every member of our church and any time a baby is born to one of those members we write that in here too. And that is kind of how it is with God's book of life. Everyone born into His family has a name in the book. But you have to be born into His family, and what happened to you in some hospital 20, or 30 or 60 years ago doesn't count. To get into God's family you have to be born again. Got it? The only way to avoid the second death is to have a second birth. As I heard someone put it: "*if you're born once you die twice; but if you're born twice you only die once and then you live forever.*" Have you been born again? Do you know with confidence that your name is in the book of life? I urge you not to take rest for your mind or heart until you know. Wrestle it out alone with God if you must or speak with a Christian friend who can help you see the simple beauty of the good news of Jesus Christ who said that he who believes in me will not perish but will have everlasting life. Much here to ponder for all of us. -Let's pray -