

1000 years of gospel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 January 2015

Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] I think you could make a reasonable case that there are seven things that are seen. Seven eyesores. The one in chapter 20 verse 4, the second one, according to my scribbles! Here is not there in the Greek. So there are seven things that were seen. And what are they? Well, I put them on the screen there. Number one, we have this rider.

I saw heaven standing open and a white horse and a rider who is called Faithful and True. So we see a rider who strikes the nations. And it's a very powerful, threatening picture, isn't it? Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword. His eyes are like blazing fire. He strikes down the nations. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Who is this person, do you think? I think it's Jesus, isn't it? And it's Jesus in a mode that we don't usually see.

Because usually we see Jesus in the mode of patience and, you know, giving people another chance and waiting and calling. But this is the end of that. It is no longer the Jesus who is saying, come to me before it's too late. Because this is a picture of when it is too late.

And it's a very frightening picture. When people get cross for a wrong reason, then you laugh at them.

But if people are angry for a good reason, then it's a fearsome thing. And this is Jesus, who is not angry in any comical way. He's in full battle mode, isn't he? That his enemies are going to get his comeuppance, get their comeuppance. And it says that he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

[2 : 26] So that's a strong, strong picture. And then this second picture, verse 17 to 18.

It's, I suppose the nearest thing we can get to it is thinking of the battlefields in the First World War, where thousands upon thousands of young men went over the top in the trenches, simply to be mown down.

And to have their bodies strewn one upon another, one upon another, in their thousands, in the trenches of those fields in Flanders and so on. And I dare say wild animals at their corpses. But this is what this picture is of the angel saying, come on, this is what's going to happen. So we have a battlefield, a supper of dead armies. And then we have in verse 19 to 21, another picture. And I think these pictures overlap. I don't think they're one after another. I think they're different pictures of the same thing. This is the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies who are defeated. And the, it says that the, the two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur in verse 20.

The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. So it's another picture of a fearful, fearful judgment. Now the next eyesore is the angel who has a key and a chain. And that we'll look at separately.

[4 : 31] But please notice that the other thing that is seen are thrones in verse four. So there's several things going on here and overlapping the angel, the dragon, the thrones.

There's a blessed put in there. Verse six, blessed are the blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. You might remember how many times it says blessed in the book of revelation?

Seven. And this is number six, this is number five of those. And it talks about the first, the second death, first resurrection. So we're thinking there's a first and there's a second, two stages of something. And the sixth vision is of the great white throne.

And this vision is not a vision of an army and of a battle, but of a courtroom and searching through the records. So in verse 12, I saw the dead, great and small standing before the throne and the 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. And so there's a, there's at least one book, perhaps two books, book of, uh, the lamb's book of life and the book of all the things that people have done.

A little bit like, um, all, all the references to you on Google. Apparently, if you don't like what was said about you on Google, you can ask to have it deleted, but you can't ask to have anything deleted from, from this book. It's a record of all the things that people have done.

[6 : 27] And then, uh, the new heaven and the new earth is there in chapter 21. So that's the sort of context that it's fitting into.

So let's, do you know, that wasn't supposed to be as complicated as that. Let's see whether I've, oh, that's even worse. Right. I've got two slides mixed up. Let's see what we can do.

So some of it you have to ignore, because it wasn't supposed to be there the first time. So which of the bits you're not supposed to ignore? Can you see two horizontal lines? A dashed line, look, that one there in the middle, and another line. So we've got an H, an E, and an A.

You see those? So the, these are the three, uh, layers of the world in the book of Revelation. So there's heaven and earth, which is our bit, and then the abyss, the bit underneath the place where Satan's headquarters is, if you like. It's not teaching us geology or geography. It's, it's, it's like a spiritual truth, if you like, but this is the way the book of Revelation portrays it.

Right. So there's a movement, uh, chapter 20, verse one. Who moves from where to where? So that's a real question. Anybody like to answer? Who moves from where to where?

[7 : 56] Who moves from where to where? So who, who does the moving?

An angel. An angel. Yeah. I saw an angel coming down out of heaven. An angel. And the angel has a key to the abyss. That's what it says.

And this angel takes the dragon, the serpent, or Satan. So it's, it's named in three different ways. The dragon, the serpent, that's the snake, the devil, or Satan. Actually, that's four different ways, isn't it?

And he's chained up. How long is he chained up for? A thousand years. So that's the line at the top was meant to just say a thousand years.

So if we get the little people. So we've got heaven, earth, the abyss, the dragon, down there for a thousand years. Right. At the end of the thousand years, going to verse seven, at the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth and gather them for battle.

[9 : 17] So that's the, that's the arrow at the end here. And the scales weren't supposed to be there, but the crossed swords were. Yeah, crossed swords is the symbol for a battle.

So, a thousand years, long time, in a little short time, Satan is allowed to deceive the nations and instigate this final battle.

And is he successful in the battle? No, no, no, he's not successful. It says there's a huge conflict. But fire came down from heaven, verse nine, and devoured them.

And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They'll be tormented day and night forever and ever. So there's one, that's one strand of things, isn't it?

So, Satan is bound for the thousand years and then in the last battle he's defeated completely and permanently. Right, let's look at the other thing that's going on, which is in verse four.

[10 : 33] I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. So that's why I put the thrones there, the chairs.

Okay, that's the chairs at the top. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God.

They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. So these are believers who have stood their ground and been killed.

Now I'm going to say, I don't think, although it says they had been beheaded, I think that is a case of where you take one example to stand for a wider group of people.

And there's a special word for it, but I can't remember what it is. What's the word? Ben usually knows words. Where you take one and the one person stands for a whole group of people.

[11 : 35] Symbol. Okay, symbol, representative. Yeah, there's a really, really clever sounding Greek word for it, but I can't remember what it is. Anyway, so I don't think this is only people who have been beheaded.

So I think if people had been burnt at the stake, perhaps they would be included. And I think I would go further and say it's all those people who had stood up for the Lord Jesus and not given in. And what we're told about these is that they came to life. Can you see that in verse 4? So they had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands.

They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. So that's why I put the little person there who was lying down as dead and pops up.

They, as it says, came to life and reigned. So I was hoping that little person would be somewhere near those chairs at the top and reigning for a thousand years.

[12:40] Does that make sense so far? No, but archetype would be a good word. I'll think of it one day.

Right, that is described in verse 5 as the first resurrection. You're following all this. Now it says the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.

So hence, a little person over on the left-hand side which pops up would be an example of one of these believers. But the people who don't come into that category wait until the end of the thousand years.

And then they pop up. Resurrection number one, resurrection number two. Yeah? It's a puzzling picture, isn't it? But that's what the picture is.

It's said of the people in the first resurrection, verse 6, Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them.

[13:54] But they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. So these people are not going to be hurt by the second death, which comes up at the end.

They're sort of secure. And they are currently priests of God and of Christ. And they are currently reigning. So that's the picture.

Who are they? What's all this about? Let's just follow it through to the end of the terminus, this end here. And what I would like to suggest is that we have got a number of pictures concerning the end. And they're not different events, but they're the same huge event, which is so huge that it has to be described in a number of different ways. So, as I said, it's depicted as a battle.

So I put the battle sign there. It's also depicted as a reading of books. Verse 12. For the great white throne, earth and sky fled from his presence.

[15:05] There was no place for them. Verse 12. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life.

So it's opening of books. You see a little book up there? And then I put some scales. These are supposed to be scales. Perhaps look like two dead kites, but actually they're scales.

They're meant to be scales. Anybody know what scales is a symbol of in European culture? Justice. Yes, justice. So I'm meaning this to depict opening of books.

Great battle. Great justice. And this is what is said about this day of justice. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

Verse 12. The sea gave up the dead that were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them. And each person was judged according to what he had done. So it is a judgment according to works.

[16:15] Now please notice my word according, because that's quite an important word. Works are the factor in this, but they're a particular sort of factor.

And of course, what's written in the book of life is a factor too. If anybody's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

So that's what happens at the end there. Now I'm going to propose an interpretation of that. But before I do so, I'd like you to look at another picture, which is in John's Gospel, chapter 5.

Because I wouldn't blame you if you were to say, well, I don't think you made a very convincing case.

You did it too quickly, and you left a lot of bits out. I would quite respect your view if you said that. But what I'm going to do is point us to John, chapter 5, from verses 24 to 30.

[17:26] And this isn't written in symbolism. All you have to do is read carefully the text. And this paints a picture for us too.

And I would like to suggest that this picture is very similar to the other, and it's pretty much the same. So this is Jesus himself speaking. In John, chapter 5, he said to a sick man, arise.

And the chap got up. And that little idea, that motif, echoes through the chapter. Can you imagine that? The sick man and Jesus says, get up.

And up he gets. That's what this is following. So in verse 24, Jesus says, I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

[18:43] For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this.

For a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

By myself I can do nothing. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just. For I seek not my own will, I seek not to please myself, but him who sent me.

So a little snippet from a very significant speech by Jesus. So would you agree with me in those six or so verses?

It's talking about people coming from death to life. Would you agree with me? It talks about people coming from death to life. Now then, let's look at the first one.

[19:43] Verse 24. It says, somebody has crossed from death to life. A little bit like when Jesus said to the lying down person, get up. And he moved from there to there, crossed over.

And here is somebody crossing over from death to life. Now then, which people is Jesus talking about? What description is given for this person who crosses over from death to life?

Please. He hears the word and believes. Yeah? Did somebody say anything different? There were several people answered at once.

Yeah. Believes him who sent me. He hears my word and believes. So this is the people who hear the word and believe. And they cross over from death to life.

Now in verse 25, I think it's saying the same thing. I tell you the truth, the time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

[20:49] So I'm going to ask the question, is that talking about something that is only in the future? What does it say?

What does the text say? Yeah. Can you see that in verse 25? The time is coming and has now come. So he's not talking about something which is in the distant future.

It's something that is now here already. So I put on my little picture there, somebody crossing from death to life. At the top is Jesus saying, arise, and somebody goes from lying down to standing up. And here's somebody going from death to life. And this person hears. Yes? Okay. Now let's look at the next few verses. Now the great, the renowned and well-known Bible scholar N.T. Wright says that these verses are saying exactly the same thing as the ones we just looked at.

See if you agree with him. Verse 28. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out.

[22:05] Those who have done good will rise to live. Those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. Now would you agree with me that this is talking about people who are dead coming to life, coming to live.

Is that correct? Yeah, that's what it says, isn't it? Is it the same crossing from death to life as was in the first few verses?

Do you think it's the same? Okay. You think it's not the same. What are the differences between the first popping up from death to life and this second one?

What are the differences? The first one is a time to life. Mm-hmm. And the second one, the sun is a time to life.

The other is a time to life. Okay. Okay. Yes. That's true. That's there. Yeah. Yeah. The first one is hearing.

[23:08] Is not the second one hearing then? No. The second one is hearing. Right. Yeah. Let's try and tease it out a bit at a time.

Is the first one to do with hearing the voice and the second one not to do with hearing the voice?

Okay. So in both cases they hear his voice.

Okay. In the first case, what accompanies the hearing? Believing. Yeah. Hears and believes. In the second case, it doesn't say that, does it?

And in fact, you find that it can't possibly be accompanied by faith. So the first one is hearing and believing. The second one is hearing. And who is the group of people in the first and the second? The same group of people? No. What's the difference between them? No.

[24 : 15] Don't go as far as that. Go back a bit. The second group. Which people hear his voice? What does it actually say? In their graves.

Yeah. And what's the word before that? All. All. Do you agree? All who are in their graves will hear his voice. So that's all the dead. Yeah? Yeah. So this second is what you'd say a general resurrection.

The first is the resurrection of those who hear and believe. Yeah? Do you agree with me? These people hear and believe and they cross from death to life.

The second one is a general resurrection. The second one is a general resurrection and they rise to what? So what happens next? So this is what the bit that Maria was getting on to.

What happens in the second general resurrection? They rise to what? To judgment. Yeah. To judgment. It says those who have done good will rise to live.

[25 : 14] Those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. So there's a judgment. Which is why I put the scales there. Now notice the subtlety of this.

Who was it in the first case who enters life? What did they have to do? What was their qualification to cross from death to life? Believe.

They believed. The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. And the believer springs out from death to life.

They were caught in a trap and now they're free. That's the believer. Now that is what it says there. John isn't stupid. So we need to harmonize that and the answer to the next question.

In the judgment in verse 29, what is the qualification of those who enter life?

[26 : 27] That's correct. They've done good. That's what it says, isn't it? So we're saved by faith.

On the day of judgment, works will be there. It is those who have done good that will rise to live. Those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

And I don't think John is stupid. I don't think he's contradicting himself. But what he is doing is making this connection and saying, if you're a real believer, because it is through faith that we're saved.

If you're a real believer, it absolutely can't help but change your life. If you're a real believer, it must show.

And what Jesus will do on that last day is say, well, let's see, was it real? Yeah, look, it shows. Here's somebody.

[27 : 23] You can look at what they've done. You can see they're a believer. They're not being saved by their works. They're being judged according to their works.

And Jesus, it's a diagnostic thing. Jesus says, does this person show in a real and practical sense that they were a follower of me?

Yes. Not saying they were perfect, because they weren't. Not saying that they were sinless because their sins were paid for by Jesus, but their life was changed.

That's what I mean by the judgment according to works. And that's what is described in John chapter 5. Are you with me in John chapter 5?

Yeah, okay, let's see if we... Yes. Yes. How does that fit with the people on the cross to... Yeah. Yeah.

[28 : 23] Well, I think by works, we can include the testimony that people give. So, for example, these people who are beheaded would have been beheaded for saying they trusted in Jesus, standing up.

You know, it wasn't just talk, was it? It was dangerous talk. It was committed talk. And I think the thief on the cross, he was different to the other thief. It showed, didn't it? Because he said, Lord, we're here because we deserve it.

This man has done no wrong. Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom. So, I think there was something you could say. You know, you could see on the outside he was different.

That's the... I mean, he's an unusual case, isn't he?

But I think there's something there that you could say, yeah, he's different, that guy. Yeah. Yeah. So, if there's something to do with God in some...

In some places, it says, without faith, it's impossible to please God. That's right. So, about the believer's faith is what brings them.

[29 : 28] What do you see is their good views? Well, without faith, it is impossible to please God, as in Hebrews 11. And Hebrews 11 is a chapter of great achievers, isn't it?

By faith, some refused to... Well, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing to suffer ill treatment along with the people of God that he might receive a better reward. So, all those people of faith, it made a difference in the way they lived. So, faith and works are linked together. They're not the same thing. We're justified by faith.

But faith is bound to show, you know, faith without works is dead. Yeah. So, that's how it says they have done the good. Hmm. It's implied that they have faith.

Yes, exactly. Yeah. It's implied they have faith because John himself states earlier that those people who cross from death to life are the people who hear and believe. Yeah.

[30 : 30] Correct. Yes. Well, yeah, that's right. But the question is... Well, the question is that Jesus is the judge and not us.

And also the thing is that he would look at the whole picture in the way that we can't. So, there is, for example, the issue of hypocrisy.

And hypocrisy is being a play actor. A play actor does from 7.30 till 10 o'clock plus a curtain call is the Queen of Sheba.

And then the rest of the time is just Molly Scroggins or whatever. So, there's a big discrepancy between the two parts of their life. And Jesus would see both parts, wouldn't he?

And he would say, you know, well, that looked very good. But actually, if you look at that, why do you call me Lord, Lord, but not do the things that I say?

[31 : 31] Or that many will do mighty works in my name, but I'll say to them, depart from me, you evildoers. I never knew you. So, I can't, and I shouldn't try to answer the question exhaustively, but I can say Jesus will know.

And of course, it will give credit for things that have been, you know, good things that people have done. They're not nothing. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yeah, because motivation and things like that come into it as well. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. So, I'm going to suggest that my complicated picture in Revelation, which is written by John, is actually not hugely different to the perhaps less complicated picture in John's Gospel.

In both cases, you have people who pass from death to life at the beginning, the early part of it. In Revelation, they're dead Christians.

In John's Gospel, they're all Christians. It's the same idea. They go from death to life. In both of them, there is an intervening period.

[33 : 08] And in both of them, there is a second stage, which looks a bit like the first, but isn't the same. A general resurrection in John's Gospel and in the book of Revelation.

All the dead are raised up for this mighty judgment. And in both cases, it's there in the book of Revelation, people are judged according to what they have done.

That's what it says in chapter 20, verse 13. Same as in John's Gospel. So, I'm not going to pursue that any further. Whether I've convinced you or not, I don't know.

But I'm going to draw to a conclusion because we have communion in a moment. Here are some thoughts about it. The book of Revelation depicts a thousand years and a short time.

And I think symbolically and proportionately, a much longer time in which Satan is bound than the time in which he is able to cause mischief.

[34 : 19] Just leave that at that. The first resurrection I am linking with being born again. Born again is when people believe in Jesus Christ and come to him in such a way that as they believe, he brings new spiritual life into their lives, and they pass from death to life.

It's difficult to sort of describe it. But almost certainly if it's happened to you, you would know about it. Because things would be different.

You would see things in a different way to what you saw them before. You would react to things in a different way to what you saw before. You would have a new set of desires and a new set of things that you don't like, that you used to think were great.

But when you've been born again, you lose your appetite for them. So the first resurrection is being born again. The thrones, I have a parallel passage in Ephesians chapter 2, which speaks about current believers.

And if I haven't convinced you from Revelation, I think you'd be convinced by Ephesians chapter 2, 4, 5, and 6, which says, Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.

[35 : 50] Even when we were dead in transgressions, it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

Which I'd say is exactly the picture in Revelation of coming up and sitting on thrones, enthroned with Christ even now. And I would also have got a reference for the binding of Satan in Mark's gospel chapter 3, where Jesus, the mighty warrior, speaks about entering a strong man's property, house, and carrying off his possessions, having first bound or tied up the strong man.

It's not saying that Satan is totally paralyzed. Of course he's not. He is active. But it is saying that his activities are restricted and limited in a way that they weren't before.

So, in particular, the nations used to be totally ignorant of the gospel. In the Old Testament, they're totally ignorant of the gospel.

In the New Testament, Satan is not allowed to do that anymore. And the gospel goes out and many people from many nations come to faith. I'm going to say that the second resurrection is that general resurrection.

[37 : 29] The final end is depicted as a battle and a books and court. And I'm going to say that if we were to think about it a bit longer, perhaps we would think this is a great encouragement for Christian mission.

Because this is the age in which people are unblinded, in which Satan is not allowed just to hang on to all his goods, but the strong man comes and takes goods from his kingdom.

We could say that there's a great privilege in being a Christian. Because strange though it may seem, although we're so conscious of our sin, God says you're already enthroned with me, with Christ, raised with him to new life and enthroned with him.

We could also consider the future certainty, that there's no doubt about what will happen. And it's actually written down for us. Believers will be saved.

Satan is doomed. There will be a new world, a new heaven and a new earth, in which there is holiness and righteousness. We might be challenged by the thought, if I was put in that situation, would there be enough evidence to convict me?

[38 : 50] Is my life different? If being a Christian was a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict me? Do you see what I mean? There will be enough evidence to say, yes, that person is different.

And to finally think, this is really about Jesus Christ, the Lamb, and the certainty of his victory. Let's stop there.