

Revelation 20:1–10

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: 09 November 2008

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Revelation chapter 20 verses 1 through 10 and that can be found in the Blue Bibles on page 1040. That's Revelation chapter 20 verses 1 through 10.

Please stand for the reading of God's Word. Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit and shut it and sealed it over him so that he might not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years were ended.

After that, he must be released for a little while. Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.

Also, I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.

[1 : 20] They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection. Over such, the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle.

Their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.

But fire came down from heaven and consumed them. And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were.

[2 : 23] And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Thank you. I don't know how you felt this morning when you got up and looked out your window and saw the snow falling in springtime.

There's one peculiar benefit to the oddities of Chicago weather. Chicago weather. I've come to think that the patterns of Chicago weather are meant by God to teach us to read the book of Revelation.

Chicago weather helps us interpret Revelation. Did you ever know that? Well, today we've been given one of the most disputed passages in all the New Testament, but it'll all be clear when I'm done.

And it will be clear through our understanding of the way Chicago weather works. Chicago weather is, if anything, unpredictable.

Frustrating. Outsiders. Outsiders. That is, those who move to the Midwest for doctoral studies or undergraduate work, are often confused by it.

- [4 : 08] Not sure what to do with it. They've come to realize this morning, though, that Chicago weather is governed by a mysterious set of principles.
- Principles not found elsewhere. Look at it this way. Conventional weather follows the clear pattern of chronological sequence.
- In other words, fall follows what? Summer. Winter follows fall.
- And spring follows winter. But this week, we have been provided with a peripheral example of how Chicago weather differs from conventional wisdom.
- According to the conventional calendar, last Sunday was the first Sunday of spring. I even mentioned it from this pulpit. Finally, the light was yet streaming through these windows in the sky long after 6 p.m.
- [5 : 23] You might remember last week. The air was warm, reaching into the 60s. And the Holy Trinity Church.
- And the Holy Trinity Church goers arrived at our service without coat or gloves, without hat or mittens.
- And then we come to today. And then we come to today. A week later in time, and you find yourself this morning in a state of depression or confusion.
- You awoke to falling snow. You awoke to falling snow. To the sounds of plows on the main arteries.
- To temperatures which were a few degrees above freezing. Winter returned. As my children came down to the kitchen and looked outside, I said, what do you think of today?
- [6 : 26] And one looked and rubbed his eyes and said, depressing. You see, though, while conventional wisdom may follow the clearly defined paths that are ruled by chronology, and by that I mean once winter is over, you don't go back.
- Everything follows on into spring. Chicago weather is ruled by the pattern of rolling and repeating seasonal interplay.
- We don't have four clear seasons. We can have them all in a day. And as it is with the weather, so it is with the book of Revelation.
- Take a look at our text. Chapter 20, verses 1 to 10. Conventional wisdom declares that the two visions here, and there are two visions.
- Look at the opening phrase of chapter 20, verse 1, then I saw. And then a separate and distinct vision beginning from verse 4 and through verse 10, then I saw.
- [7 : 41] Conventional wisdom declares that these two visions follow in time, chronologically upon the heels of the events in chapter 19.
- And the word then even seems to imply it. And so we read last week of the great victorious Christ on his horse, coming at the last day of judgment.
- And the great feast, the wedding table for the bride early in chapter 9, had turned by the end upon the nations, all the birds gathering for the great supper of God.
- And we expect that it is all done, finished, complete, over. And that what we will be reading now takes us in time beyond it.
- But if we've learned anything through our about 40-week journey in Revelation, we have seen that in apocalyptic literature, the writer is not governed by chronological sequence.
- [8 : 59] As much as the writer is governed by the rolling and repeating seasonal interplay. We notice this first back in chapter 8, verse 1 to 5.
- Take a look. When we arrived at chapter 8, we were concluding the opening of the seventh seal.

We had come to the end. To the end of time. The judgments of the four horsemen poured out upon the earth were finished.

The day of the Lord had arrived. And look at the language of chapter 8, verse 5. This cataclysmic ending. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth.

And there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. Yet just when conventional wisdom says that what follows should come after those events in time, we're introduced to what?

[10:16] Take a look. Seven trumpets. And the pattern of chronological sequence was broken. For with the sound of each trumpet, we were brought back in time to the repeating, rolling judgments of God that come upon the earth in one sense from the beginning of the earth until the end, but in a particular sense from the first coming of Christ until his second.

And we followed those seven trumpets. And by chapter 11, verse 18, we had been brought to the seventh trumpet and again to the end of time.

Look at chapter 7, verse 18. Then God's temple in heaven was opened and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. And notice the language, how clear it is to the concluding verse of the seven seals.

Chapter 11, verse 19b. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. And one would expect that we've arrived at the end.

Yet in chapter 12, verse 1, we're not carried forward in time. We are given seven visions through chapter 15, verse 4 that roll the clock back, that return us to the earlier seasons of human history.

[12:04] That's what happened in 12, 1 and following. And look how that section ends in 15, 4. We have arrived again at a moment of the end.

And according to conventional wisdom, chapter 16 should bring what? A clear change of seasons. But it doesn't.

The seven visions have given way to seven bowls. And the seven bowls retrace for the reader the activity of God throughout all of human history.

Again, until arriving once more at what we would anticipate to be the final day. chapter 16.

Take a look. It's important that you see this so that you'll know how to read the book. Chapter 16, verses 17 and 18. We see we have arrived at the seventh bowl and look at the language.

[13:13] The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne saying what? It is done. Paraphrased. Winter is over.

And then the language which we would expect to see having now been learning how to read through these sequences. Verse 18. And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on earth.

So great was that earthquake. And the entire city then becomes split. And Babylon itself is asked to drink the cup of wine. And all the islands flee away.

And there are no more mountains to be found. And hailstones come. It is a severe indication that you have come to the end.

So in Revelation, the seven seals were not the end. they gave way to this rolling look again at history of the seven trumpets.

[14:25] And the seven trumpets gave way to seven visions. And the seven visions gave way to seven bowls. And as we have been seeing in these past few weeks, the seven bowls give way to a series of visions that again retrace God's victory over his four great foes.

So a few weeks ago in chapter 17 we saw the ultimate vindication of God over the prostitute that had misled his people and the world throughout all the centuries.

Not only the prostitute but the beast. The two great foes thrown down. In chapter 18 we saw his victory over Babylon itself. And we saw the cheering that came from the saints in chapter 19.

And so we come then to chapter 20. And what we have here does not follow chronologically the sequence of time in chapter 19.

It is the fourth and final sequence of visions that demonstrate how God in human history and through human history defeats his greatest of adversaries Satan.

[15 : 47] He is called here the dragon and the ancient serpent the devil. So we are not moving forward in time as if the events listed in chapter 20 follow those described in 19.

Rather we are rolling back through the ages again to see God gaining his final victory over his fearful foe Satan.

Take a look at the first vision. Chapter 20 verses 1 to 3. I'm going to read that and I want you to pay attention to the verbs.

For the verbs according to my own understanding are meant to be applied to Jesus at his first coming not Jesus concerning the events that would follow his second coming.

Chapter 20 verse 1 then I saw an angel coming down from heaven holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit in a great chain and he seized the dragon that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan and bound him for a thousand years and threw him into the pit and shut it and sealed it over him so that he might not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years were ended.

[17 : 26] After that he must be released for a little while. coming down he seized him and he bound him.

I want you to turn back to the gospel of Matthew. I want you to see how Jesus uses the very term that John is employing here for the word bound.

Matthew chapter 12 verses 28 and 29 Jesus of course in this section was being questioned by the Pharisees who were beginning to put forward the idea that Jesus was accomplishing his works through the power of Beelzebul the prince of demons.

That he was casting things out by the power of the evil one. Jesus responds with these very famous words about a house divided against itself and how ludicrous it would be for him to be Satan for indeed it would mean that Satan is undoing his own kingdom.

And he gives in a sense this illustration or parable on the kingdom. Verse 29 how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds there's our word the strong man.

[19 : 17] Then indeed he may plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And Jesus in the telling of this parable references himself as the one who is stronger than the strong man Satan.

And that with his earthly ministry and his miracles and supremely in his death and resurrection and ascension he has come to do what?

To bind the strong man. And notice he uses the word here not in a literal way but in a figurative way.

He is figuratively binding the strong man so that he might overthrow his kingdom and gain treasure for God.

it's not the only time in the New Testament that the word binding or being bound is used figuratively rather than literally.

[20 : 26] Turn forward to Luke's writing in Acts 20. Hopefully I'll hear your pages rustling.

You do know that if you don't follow well you won't pay attention well. And notes even helps you pay attention better so our teachers told us. Acts chapter 20 and verse 22 we have another reference to the word binding or bound used figuratively.

Paul writes and now behold I am going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit not knowing what will happen to me there except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

Now this little phrase constrained by is that he was bound by and he uses that figuratively. Take a look further in the Bible Romans chapter 7 and verse 2 where we see the binding of the law or do you not know brothers for I am speaking to those who know the law that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives.

Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband. Again figuratively bound to fulfill the obligations of that law.

[21 : 59] 1 Corinthians 7 and verse 27 Are you bound to a wife? Now certainly he's not referring here to what happened to me my junior year in college in an interpersonal communication class that I to this day wish I had not taken.

For it didn't take long for the professor to say here's an 18 inch long rope you are to bind it to your wrist find someone in the class of the opposite sex and bind the loose end of that rope to theirs and you are going to be bound together for 18 straight hours.

That was a nightmare for me. The only time we could unhook the ropes was to go to the bathroom. I never sat in a bathroom stall so long as I did on that day.

The poor girl she must have thought I had died in there. But I knew oh when I go out of that door I've got to tie this thing back up again. Now when it says here you're bound to her husband it just means figuratively obligated to remain.

So let's come back to Revelation 20. Some people think that the binding of Satan must be this kind of literal activity that effectuates the complete cessation of his reach as if he is so restricted that he cannot move.

[23 : 34] well that's certainly not the case even in the New Testament isn't it? Jesus we've already seen claimed that in his coming he did what?

He bound Satan. And what does Peter say concerning the activity of Satan during that time? take a look at 1 Peter in verse 8 chapter 5 in verse 8 be sober minded be watchful your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour resist him see the binding of Satan by Jesus under his own words does not mean the complete cessation of the activity of the Satan or the evil one he's still prowling he's still roaming he's still seeking to undo your life damn that evil one who would wreak havoc upon all of us if he had unmitigated reach and strength he's certainly stronger than me and stronger than you and active today indeed if we had been a careful reader of revelation 20 we would have seen the nature of the binding take a look back at chapter 20 in verse 3 and he threw him into the pit and shut it and sealed it over him why so that he might not deceive the nations any longer that's what it means to be bound

Satan no longer has the authority to keep the nations the Gentiles from coming to know salvation through Christ he cannot blind them anymore he cannot hold them the gospel will go forth even when and though he is on the prowl that's the nature of the restriction he can no longer deceive the nations people can come to faith for how long for a thousand years this too is to be understood symbolically not literally as we've walked through this entire book I cannot think of a significant reference to a number that was to be taken literally other than symbolically even the two edged sword early in revelation refers to the two functions or the two purposes of that sword it's it's a figurative understanding

I go back to the time when we were with the 12,000 and the 144,000 and how those numbers evidenced the fullness of God's family and how we came to understand that even in the listing of the 12,000 and the 12 tribes not all of the 12 tribes were listed and that it didn't represent literal Israel it represented all of God's family the children of Abraham the church and all of its fullness and all of its distinction so to here when we come to the 1,000 years we are to understand this as a full length of time a complete length of time a fixed point of time it's the age of the gospel it refers to the period between his ascension and his return how long will

Satan's ability be restricted in deceiving the nations for a full length of time until right up to the very end and then he will be as we'll see in a few moments loosed to deceive the nations in a more significant way so the urgency of this hour is great it's great for a few reasons if you have not yet come to know Jesus Christ by that I mean you have not submitted your life to his reign Satan does not have the authority or the power to condemn you to hell if you will repent and believe in the gospel and people do repent and believe in the gospel every day and they are delivered from that strength that retribution that grip that hold so this first vision 21 to 3 has implications

[28 : 50] Christ death resurrection and ascension ushered in a figurative thousand year reign it's not that I don't believe in a millennium it's that I don't believe there will be a literal material millennium following the return of Christ but rather there is a figurative spiritual real millennium period of time that is fixed between his ascension and his return we're in it and the prince of the air who's behind the destruction of our lives is in Christ incapable standing us before the presence of God and saying look look at him he's a sinner well that may be true look I I judged this one she's a sinner and she continues to sin and

Jesus says well he or she has put their faith in me and in my righteousness you have no power over them to death isn't that encouraging this vision is meant to give confidence to our personal witness we ought to be proclaiming through our words the power of the gospel to those who need to be delivered why because we know that in this hour the evil one will have no hold it ought to bring strength to our prayers in Luke it was while Jesus was praying that he comes out of his prayers and asks his disciples who do you think I am and

Peter says you are the Christ of God prayer was the work that brought about the revelation of his identity and as we learn to pray for the salvation of those whom we love it is a greater power and a greater strength of which the devil has no ability to thwart we ought to be running to the throne in prayer knowing that he cannot deceive the nations pleading for the salvation of those we know and proclaiming the news of the gospel that in his death you can be forgiven yes this ought to provide confidence to our prayer it ought to provide an anticipation of conversion in our witness it ought to provide an expectation to the nature of public preaching as the word of the gospel goes forth from this pulpit in this community over the next 25 years every attendee ought to upon their entrance into the doors be praying to

God that through the power of his word and the strength of the gospel he would be revealing himself and winning people to himself while the evil one no longer has power to deceive any longer and this vision ought to encourage you in your private failings who here doesn't fail who here is faithful but the scriptures say though we are faithless he remains faithful he has done the work it is in his death and resurrection it is in his strength it is in his power it is in his binding that ought to encourage you in your failings the gospel of Jesus Christ is not a gospel that says well when you get it all together come and praise him right no he has come he has come down he has seized he is bound and you are free

Jesus writes in the ground well where are your accusers well they've all gone home well then neither do I accuse you go sin no more hallelujah the second vision is meant to encourage first listeners in gospel endurance remember the saints to whom this book was first written were men and women under severe persecution persecution that you or I in this country know nothing of suffering not merely being maligned but martyred we have seen that throughout this book they were being killed for their faith in the gospel they had a real need for what endurance!

[34 : 30] And then they read 4-7 imagine I mean take a look at 4-7 imagine how that would encourage them in gospel endurance it gives them two motivations to remain pure in a hostile world look at 4-7 the participation in the reign of Christ what a motivation to remain pure then I saw thrones and seated on them where those who had the authority the judge was committed also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God and who had not worshipped the beast of their hands they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended this is the first resurrection blessed and holy is the one who shares in this first resurrection over such the second death has no power but they will be priests of

God and of Christ and they will reign with him for a thousand years and the first readers of John's Apocalypse knew that if I remain faithful if I do not compromise if I still hold to the testimony of Christ as my righteousness and my righteousness alone and if I suffer for it and if I am maligned for it and if I am even martyred for it I will go immediately from this hostile world into the presence of the living God wherein I will reign with him for the duration until his return and then after his return I will share in his meal with all of the children through the ages what a motivation look at how this second vision has moved the reader from below in the abyss to the very heights of heaven and it is said to the readers stay strong you cannot live in your own strength but continue to hold to the testimony of Jesus as your righteousness and suffering as it comes will only mean that upon your death you reign with

Christ chapter 20 verse 4 you reign with him chapter 20 verse 7 your death is but your entrance into glory glory and participatory reign and so the readers would have thought I have got to stay strong in my belief in Jesus I'm not going to transfer having started with Jesus some ignoble thought that I am to be strong in my own strength from here on out I'm going to hold to the testimony of the gospel I'm not going to compromise that salvation comes through faith in Christ I'm not going to live as those who are any longer under the power and authority of the world and I know that upon my death I will be raised that is the first resurrection my death actually my death here becomes a resurrection there what a motivation the participating reign of

Christ and verses 8 through 10 and with this we conclude the second motivation the anticipation of his second coming when the thousand years are ended this must be right before the very end Satan will be released from his prison and he will come out to deceive the nations there's that word again he's now been given greater power to deceive the nations and we should expect this as the time draws near that the world itself will be easily deceived easily misled Gog and Magog these terms for the world that's reached all the way back to the visions of Ezekiel 38 and 39 that God's enemies themselves although they gather from all over the world and although the church may be small in that hour fire will come from heaven final judgment will be rendered hope for his readers has been given

Satan the dragon the great deceiver of the nations will be put away how long for a thousand years no forever and ever let's pray our heavenly father we need encouragement for the week for as we rise in the morning we feel like we go back in the seasons what encouragement there is to hear again and again and again and again the activity of God in Christ who in history is the salvation of our soul and so we take these two great visions unto ourselves and we pray oh

[39 : 53] Lord that we would come to Christ while he may be found that we would give great strength from that motivate us to stay pure to anticipate his return to give him the glory Christ's name amen I encourage you to stand and we'll if