

The Thousand Years

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[0 : 00] Revelation 20 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 those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or 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 the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power. But they will be priests of God and of Christ.

[1 : 32] 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 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. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away.

And no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. And books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life.

[2 : 43] And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it.

Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Now, it may not come as a surprise that Monopoly was Amazon's best-selling board game during lockdown. In fact, since its introduction in 1935, over 250 million Monopoly games have been sold. I have many happy memories of playing, but also some unhappy ones, and frankly, angry memories of playing. In fact, I'm not alone.

[3 : 50] A few years ago, the company behind Monopoly decided to launch a helpline that ran from Christmas Eve to Boxing Day to mediate family arguments. You'd call them up, tell them what happened, they'd make the ruling.

I wonder whether that would be useful in your family at Christmas. And whilst I mostly enjoy playing Monopoly, the problem I found in my experience is that when you get to the last quarter or so of the game, the winners and losers become inevitable.

You know the feeling, don't you? Someone has all the properties and the hotels on Mayfair, and there's me clinging on to the stations. One other person clinging on to the waterworks, and one by one, they drop out.

Well, being a Christian, following Jesus, can often feel like you're on the wrong end of the last quarter of a Monopoly game. Feel like you're on the losing side.

Everything is stacked against you, and you're tempted just to drop out of the game, just to drop out of the Christian race altogether. Well, the book of Revelation was written to Christians under that pressure to drop out.

[5 : 09] They're suffering under persecution. But Revelation helps us not to just look at the horizontal circumstances of life, what we can see with our own eyes around us, but to know the vertical perspective, what's actually going on behind the scenes spiritually.

You see, Revelation tells us that Jesus and his people are the real winners, and Satan and his followers and all those who reject Jesus end up on the losing side.

Over the last few weeks, we've seen the downfall of Babylon, picturing civilization against Jesus, and God's people getting ready for the marriage to the Lamb.

And yet, before we get there in chapter 21, there's more wedding preparation to be done in chapter 20. That Satan and evil need to be dealt with once and for all.

And so, one of Jesus' disciples, John, is given three more visions that each start with, Then I saw. Verse 1, verse 4, verse 11, if you spot it.

[6 : 25] So we're going to take those three visions in turn. And the first vision shows us that Satan is a limited enemy. Satan's a limited enemy.

Look down at verse 1 with me. Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and the 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. It's a strange vision, isn't it? Angel coming down, capturing the devil, locking him away in a pit for a thousand years.

What's going on? Well, there's been lots of discussion over what this is referring to, and the exact timing of the events here. Whether this Satan being bound has already happened, or whether it's still to come in the future.

My own view is that this is a picture of what has already happened. That Satan has been bound, and sealed for a thousand years. A thousand years being symbolic of a long period of time, just like lots of numbers in Revelation being symbolic.

[7 : 55] Because Jesus himself talks about the binding of Satan in Mark chapter 3. There, Jesus dealt with accusations that he performed miracles through Satan's power.

But Jesus said something different was going on. So I've put Mark 3, 27 on your handout. Jesus says, No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man.

Then indeed he may plunder his house. It's a figure of description, but a real truth of what's going on. In his coming, Jesus bound Satan.

He limited his power and control and plunders him by rescuing people from under his power. You see, before Jesus was born, the nations lived in spiritual darkness.

They were deceived by Satan. But through Jesus' death and resurrection, Satan has been bound. The nations will no longer be deceived, and as a result, the gospel is going to the whole world.

[9 : 05] We recently got back from visiting my parents who live at the seaside. It's an all-inclusive trip, which I love each year, and we go to the beach pretty much every day.

And we enjoy playing Beat the Tide. You probably know how to play. You may call it something different. The rules are, you build a sandcastle close to the tide, and you try and build a wall and protect it from the incoming tides.

But ultimately, you know what's going to happen. The tide comes in. It's part of the fun. The tide comes in. It destroys the wall, and the castle is wrecked.

It breaks it down. Well, a bit like that, Satan cannot stop the tidal wave of gospel advancement. He is being plundered.

His castle of deceiving the nations is being broken down. He can't keep the world in darkness anymore. As Jesus himself declares in Matthew 16, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

[10 : 15] But this doesn't mean Satan has given up. We've seen in Revelation that he furiously attacks the church. There is a spiritual battle raging right now.

But it's like Satan is acting with one hand behind his back. He can't stop people from every tribe and tongue coming into Jesus' kingdom.

Yes, we're told in the parable of the sower, he takes the word away from people. But on a large scale, he cannot stop the gospel going to the ends of the earth.

The Christians in those Revelation churches could have looked at their circumstances around them, like at the end of a Monopoly game, thought that Satan was winning and they are losing.

The church in Smyrna, who suffered at the hands belonging to Satan. Those at Pergamum who dwell where Satan's throne is.

[11 : 17] But they could be assured that Satan can't prevent the gospel going out. What a great encouragement for them to keep going. And the same is true for us today. We live in an age of incredible gospel opportunity.

Perhaps if you're a bit like me, you tend to be pessimistic and think we're in more of a gospel retreat mode than gospel advancement. Now particularly as we feel the squeeze in the increasingly secular West.

But when we look at the whole of history, over the whole world after Jesus, the gospel has gone out to the ends of the earth and continues to bear fruit. And Satan cannot prevent that.

His work is being undone. He's bound. So we can be full of confidence that right now it really worth is proclaiming the gospel here in Dulwich and supporting our mission partners around the world to do the same.

Because whilst this is an age of persecution for God's people, Jesus promises to build his church. Satan is a limited enemy. Not only is he a limited enemy, in the second vision, we're shown that Satan is a defeated enemy.

[12 : 39] He's a defeated enemy. The next vision, it splits into two halves. The first half shows us how Satan is defeated as Christians reign with Jesus. Have a look at verse 4.

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 those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

What John sees now is what's happened to people who have been faithful to Jesus all throughout their lives. Some of them, like Antipas in Pergamum, have been martyred and killed for their faith. They look like the losers. But here we see they are the winners. They're honoured and rewarded by God. They reign with him in heaven. And that is still relevant for us today.

[13 : 48] According to the Christian charity Open Doors, every day 13 Christians worldwide are killed because of their faith. 12 churches or Christian buildings are attacked. 12 Christians are unjustly arrested or imprisoned.

And another 5 are abducted. Christian martyrs may look defeated by Satan but in fact they reign with Jesus. Revelation 20 shouts to the suffering church the martyrs of winners not losers.

Don't give up. Stand firm for Christ even at the cost of your own life. But it's not just martyrs who reign with Christ but all who are faithful to Jesus until they die.

for some that would mean execution. For others I expect for the large if not all of us in this room it's faithfulness until death by natural causes.

We might not be martyred probably won't be martyred but John is still calling us to be faithful until death and a glorious reign with Jesus to come.

[14 : 58] because nobody who is faithful to Jesus will ultimately be a loser. Then the second half of the vision shows us that Satan is a defeated enemy as he will be judged.

Verse 7 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 of the beloved city. In some way for reasons we're not told Satan will be allowed some measure of release before Jesus returns and that will lead to a final gathering of God's enemies to fight against the people of God.

Gog and Magog is a reference taken from Ezekiel 38 and 39 symbolising evil forces against God's people. In fact this battle is an action replay of last week of chapter 19 and just as we saw last week

this battle is an anti-climax isn't it?

It's over as soon as it starts. It's a complete non-event because God's enemies gather with numbers like the sand on the shore but what happens verse 9 fire comes down from heaven and consumed them and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur and where the beast and the false prophet were and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

[16:41] This is no blood and gore battle scene as in the Lord of the Rings. The battle is over as quickly as it begins. The fire goes boom Satan goes splash.

You see everything which stands against God's people persecution heresy is now destroyed. Evil is completely gone. So Christians in the past and now can rejoice that evil will not win.

We can be assured that Satan is under control now and he will be utterly defeated. He will end up in the lake of fire. He knows his time is short and so should we.

That should give us great confidence to persevere in the battle against him now. In the mundaneness of the Monday mornings. Satan is a defeated enemy.

Well the last vision in this chapter zooms out to picture God's throne room at full capacity where then the final judgment takes place.

[17:54] So thirdly everyone will be judged. Many think that when you die you travel through a tunnel of blinding light and at the other end there's deceased family members to greet you and so begins an eternal very well lit family reunion.

But the truth is God will resurrect all humanity and summon them before his throne for a final reckoning not a family picnic.

Have a look at verse 11. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne. There are no restrictions in place. Everyone great and small will be there.

Not even death can hide people. The earth and sky will flee from God's presence but we won't have that option. The judge is seated.

[19:07] Defendants are standing. The trial begins with the presentation of evidence. Verse 12. And books were opened.

Then another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. A popular assumption is that God judges with scales, not books. You're weighing up your good deeds against bad deeds. If you're 51% good, then you pass and go to heaven or some better place. But courtrooms now don't use scales and neither will God's final court.

Instead, God's court will bring forward two documents, books and the book of life. The books appear to be a record for everyone's actions.

[20:17] Imagine as you go through your day and your week, an angel is watching, scribbling away, recording everything you say, think and do in your book.

There'll be things in there that I'm sure you'll be proud of, but things we are deeply ashamed of. And it's a solemn moment then when we're standing before the judgment throne and our book comes off the shelf and it's opened, our name is read out.

But before the book is, the deeds are read out, the angel is asked to look in a different book. Not the book of deeds, but verse 12, the book of life.

Earlier in Revelation 13, it's called the book of life of the lamb who was slain. This is a register of those rescued from their sins through Jesus.

The angel looks down, looks for your name, and if it's there, that's the end of the matter. That's the end of the judgment.

[21:26] We're safe because we've trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ who took responsibility for every single thought, word and deed in our book. But for those who aren't in the book of life, the result is catastrophic.

Verse 14, then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. It really stresses the lake of fire. Three times that comes, doesn't it? And we know, don't we, that fire equals pain. Even the smallest burn hurts for hours.

So what must be the pain of being in a fire that burns forever? This is horrific and awful. Again, this is picture language, but that doesn't mean the reality will be any better for those who reject Jesus. In fact, it's quite sobering that they end up the same as Satan himself in the same place. There'll be no blagging our way through, no chance of escape.

[22 : 50] This third vision shows us everyone will be judged before the throne. And so the big glaring question is, is your name written in the book of life?

Will you trust in the Lord Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, and have your name written in that book and be safe in the judgment? For those of us who are trusting in the Lord Jesus and our names are in that book, what an encouragement that evil will come crashing down so that we can keep trusting, even to death, and we will not miss out.

And next week, we'll see just how wonderful the future will be in God's new world free from evil. But it does make us think about friends and family who we know their names aren't yet in the book of life.

And it, I guess, helps us to persevere, to plead with them and with the Lord Jesus to have their names written in that book.

book. As we come to a close, imagine you are living in occupied France in the early years of World War II. It looks and feels like you are on the losing side.

[24 : 18] But imagine going to the cinema instead of seeing on the newsreel the latest stories of Nazi advances, you saw a newsreel of the future, of the D-Day landings, the Nuremberg trials, the fall of the Third Reich.

If you could see that window into the future, well that, I guess, would have kept you going, knowing that evil will end. Even made you want to join the resistance.

That is what Revelation 20 and the whole of Revelation is doing for us. This chapter is not given for us to have endless debates about the end times, but to encourage us to stand firm for Jesus now when it looks and feels like we're losers.

So where do you feel like you're on the losing side at the moment, at the end of the Monopoly game? Perhaps it's feeling the pressure to be silent about Jesus at home, at school, or at work, or the pressure to do the wrong thing at work, or amongst your mates, or the pressure to believe the lie that we are on the losing side, that Christianity and Jesus will lose the battle.

Well, Revelation shows us the ultimate origin of that pressure is Satan, but it also shows us the great truth that Satan is bound, he's limited. People are turning to Jesus left, right, and centre, all over the show, and Satan will be destroyed.

[25 : 58] Along with all, along with all evil, and those who oppose Jesus. And so we're called not to drop out, but to stand firm, living for Jesus each day of our lives.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this window into what is happening now, and what is to come.

we thank you that Jesus wins, and that his people will win, and rule with him. We thank you that one day evil will be done away with, will be completely destroyed.

Please help us to stand firm, to keep trusting Jesus with our names written in the book of life. Amen. Amen.