

The End

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Flip with me to Revelation 20 in your Bible. Easy to find. Very last book. One of the last three chapters of the Bible.

And if you do not have a Bible, we'd love to give you one so you can reference it throughout the morning. So if you need a Bible, please raise your hand and we will locate you. We have one right there. And supply you with a Bible. You know, after singing half of those songs without knowing the words, despite Zach's valiant effort in yelling them at us.

Yeah, I know. Hey, he deserves a round of applause. Are we clapping anything around here?

Painfully aware of how in the dark we are without the word, without words.

And so it is, again, a fresh privilege to open the word together this morning. Well, the articles I recently read began with this line. One of the saddest books in the modern world is Mark Bittman's How to Cook Everything.

[1 : 27] Not because the plot is heartbreaking. It's a cookbook. Or because it documents the ravages of hunger. What's sad is that we need it.

He continues, it's a book, it's a cookbook for a society that forgot how to cook. Now, I've bought my wife, Kim, a couple Mark Bittman books over the years, and we followed his column in the New York Times for many years.

And so I was immediately intrigued by this article. He goes on to say, in former cookbooks, many things are assumed. Like how to use a knife. Like what a sifter is.

Which I'm not completely sure on. What appliances you have and need in the kitchen. But in Bittman's cookbook, nothing is assumed.

He tells you how to cook everything. How to boil water. How to slice with a knife. How to saute. Each step described in explicit detail.

[2 : 33] You can borrow it and check it out. But this author writes, How to Cook Everything is a cookbook for a society with culinary amnesia. Whose devotion to progress in technology have brought us to the point where someone has to teach us how to boil water.

The sadness of this cookbook is that we need it. While we've progressed and pressed on in so many ways and loaded our kitchen with an endless array of appliances that we must, must, must, must have.

We've forgotten so much. We've forgotten even these most basic things. Well, as Christians, we cannot make this mistake.

We must remember well. Now, we're a community that's devoted to building up and strengthening our memory. And we cannot press on to the future and forget everything that lied behind us in the past.

But nor can we get stuck in the past that we grasp for the straws of past joys. Remembering well is a matter of life and death.

[3 : 43] We remember to rehearse God's faithfulness of countless generations. But we also remember to keep our certain hope in view.

We remember so that our future hope shapes us to the core. Shapes all of our decision, all of our thinking, and all of our acting. We remember so that we cling to the faith. We remember so that we don't waste our life.

And this morning, we're going to continue our study of revelation and press in to see the end of the world as we know it and the hope that's to come.

And my hope is we'll be changed. Our memory will be changed such that we live from this and press on with greater faith, vigor, and endurance. In a word, what I hope is to proclaim is the end is upon us.

Let us not shrink back. Let us overcome. Let us not shrink back. Let us overcome. Now, since this is such a big chunk of scripture, I'm not going to read it all in one setting.

[4 : 47] We're going to pop in. But I'm going to focus on Revelation 20, verse 1, through Revelation 21, verse 8. All right? We're going to break this out in three points.

First point is the last days. The last days. The first series of visions in verses 1 to 10 is really introducing us to the rest of the world as we know it.

The rest of our lives. And John unfolds it for us. Look with me in verse 1 of chapter 20. He says, 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 was released for a little while. Now, so this first vision is this angel throwing the devil, the Satan, into a prison and locking him up for a thousand years.

[6 : 02] Now, a thousand years right here is referenced six times in this verse, or in this chapter, and nowhere else in the Bible. Now, often you'll hear scholars refer to this as the millennium, which is just literally in Latin, a thousand years.

Okay? Now, what is this talking about? Right? We want the street knowledge of this. Now, numbers, as we know, are hugely symbolic in the Revelation.

And no less here. Ten represents completeness. So, ten times ten times ten, which is a thousand, refers to, I think, a perfect, complete amount of time.

Okay? A full, complete amount of time. I don't think it's meant to be taken literally as much as it's meant to metaphorically tell us that we're looking for a perfect, complete amount of time.

Now, when does this take place? Okay, we're not going to spend too much time on this stuff, so don't worry. Interpretations vary on this question.

[7 : 11] You can take different positions. When does this millennium take place? You can be ah-mil, which means we're already in it, or post-mil, which is coming later after this life. Classic pre-mil, which is this life, and then there's a thousand years.

Or dispensational pre-mil, or some other permutation. We took a whole class on this in our cornerstone view that you can go back to listen to by a distinguished scholar named Vinny Buechler.

He does a great job at unpacking it. I think most scholars land on one of two positions. They either say we're pre-millennial, which means the millennium occurs after the return of Christ, or we're ah-millennial, which means that we're in the millennium, so to speak, now.

We're in the last days. You've probably caught where I stand by the title of this point. I think the most convincing position is the ah-millennial position.

And this is what Scripture seems to speak to me and testify to me. So what are these verses describing? All right? We're talking about the ah-millennium, but we want to keep the whole context in view.

[8 : 22] And beginning with the binding of Satan, this series of vision unveils the rest of human history after Christ's death and resurrection. This is kind of a snapshot into after his death and resurrection, before his return, so in between these two advents of Christ, we're getting a snapshot of that in these ten verses.

We're getting human history. And there's several steps that I want to mark out as we go. First, the gospel advances after Jesus binds Satan. So that's what he's talking about in verses 1 to 3.

Along with chapter 12, this description of Satan being bound and thrown into prison is describing Jesus' binding of Satan through his life and ministry. Now, I know you're thinking, really?

Well, look at me. Look at Matthew 12, 29. We have that for you. He says, How can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his good unless he first binds the strong man?

Then, indeed, he may plunder his house. So Jesus is talking about his ministry to the Pharisees in that day. And he says, How can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man?

[9 : 34] Well, this metaphorically in chapter 20 is what that's talking about. Jesus came, entered through his ministry, in the coming of the kingdom, in his life, death, and resurrection.

He bound the strong man. He bound the Satan. Right? So Jesus binds him so that he might plunder his house.

He might pluck some from Satan's grass that have been blinded by his work and might bring them from death to life in Christ.

But the main point here is that Satan is bound so that he's restrained from beginning a worldwide rebellion.

Okay? And the gospel advances. So in between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ, the gospel advances because Satan has been bound to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 34] Secondly, we get this little picture in verses 4 into believers rising to reign with Christ in heaven. Now we know that Christ is risen from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God the Father, is what Acts 2 tells us.

But peppered throughout the revelation are these pictures of the throne room. Remember that? Remember Revelation 4 and 5? We get these pictures of the throne room, the elders, and all these people falling down before the Christ.

But we also see in Revelation 6, we see the martyrs. Those who've died and passed from death to life into Christ's presence are waiting there for Christ to return.

And this is what's going on in verses 4b. Look with me there. He says, The point is that in between Christ's first coming, in His second coming, believers pass through death and into heaven, into this intermediate state, into reigning with Christ and enjoying His presence while they await His return. Now you've got to imagine the original recipients receiving this note and knowing that many persecutions are coming and approaching, and nevertheless Christ assures them that they will pass into heaven, into this intermediate state, into the presence of God above.

[12 : 18] And there they await the final battle. They join these martyrs. And their cry also becomes, Oh Lord, when will you come and vindicate yourself?

This is what we see at the end. Or through verses 7 to 10. All of the Bible points forward to this final battle.

Remember the end of Hebrews 12 where Christ says, Just once more I'm going to shake everything. Well that's what this is pointing forward to again.

So we remember that Satan was bound for a millennium and then he was released. Okay? And when he's released, he goes and begins to build this epic army.

Let's look down there together. Look at verse 7. When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are on the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle.

[13 : 24] Their number is like the sand of the sea. So after the millennium, Satan's released.

This is a good reminder, all throughout this chapter, that evil is not running amok on its own course, but it's under God's leash. And so he goes and does his thing.

He deceives the nation. So he's been pent up for so long, but he goes out and deceives the nation. And it mobilizes them for this epic battle. Now, this is what's going on in Revelation 16, Revelation 19, and these verses in Revelation 20.

It's all describing this epic final battle. This is Armageddon. We're not talking about an asteroid hitting the earth. We're talking about a global war.

Did you see that? From the four corners of the earth. We're talking about a massive army. We're talking about a massive army. Their number like the sand of the sea.

[14 : 23] I think this is just meant to be, this is humanity without God's restraint. This is humanity with Satan running amok and without God's restraint.

Now, think what you will about our commander-in-chief or any other leaders of this world.

And I don't think we all know what to think or how to think, but rulers are God's agents, even ungodly ones, and used by God to hold people under restraint.

If you just take the last 10 years and you look at the Middle East and you see the effect of poor rulers and toppled rulers and you see the upheaval and the unrest, well, this is what's going on in Revelation 20.

This is worldwide upheaval, worldwide unrest. This is all of humanity without God's restraint. This is all of his agents plucked out of their positions.

[15 : 31] This is all of humanity marching united in open rebellion, a massive army all throughout the world marching in disobedience and revolt against God.

And just when you think they'd take over, look in verse 9 with me. This massive army, 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.

I just love that. This is the greatest army humanity's ever seen. This is the greatest army. All the people, like the number of sand on the sea and they're just marching throughout the world, all united against God.

Then God said, pluck some out with a little fire. Puny in the sight of the Lord. And finally, the end of history as we know it.

Verse 10, That old beast is thrust under the foot of Christ and thrust into the lake of fire.

[16 : 53] Second, the final judgment. The final judgment. The second vision seems to flow chronologically to me and focuses on the final judgment in verses 11 through 15.

Look at me in verse 11. He says, 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 open to them. Now there's several things we immediately notice about this.

The created world is fading away. Now this vision is stretching the bounds of human language.

When he says, I saw the great white throne and him who was seated on it and from his presence earth and sky fled away.

They're personified like they're running away from the throne. There's no place found for them. It's so interesting that earth and sky is all that we see and then immediately in this vision it's all it's not seen when we see the throne, the great white throne.

[18 : 14] Everything's pushed out of view. The great white throne stands in the center of everything that's seen. The point is God the Father who's always been omnipresent that means everywhere equally present since the beginning of the world now sits exalted on a throne in plain view of the entire world.

What was not known is now known to all that it is God with whom we have to do. The created world gets in the way and we get distracted and begin to think that we've got to be faithful to all these things that are before us in this created world but this reminds us that it is God with whom we have to do.

It is before the face of God that we are to live as I said and move and have our being. All the questioning and wondering what this life is all about is silenced in a moment when the great white throne comes into view and it's very clear that God reigns over all and people pour into view.

This is so interesting to me. The dead are resurrected and brought before the throne. Now this is crazy. Look at verse 13.

Not crazy. This is interesting. More socially accepted version of crazy. Verse 13 says, And the sea gave up the dead who were in it.

[19 : 52] 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. The sea gave up the dead. Death and Hades gave up the dead.

Now what does that mean? The point is all who've died whether they died in the sea whether they died on the land all of them are given up.

All of them are sent back out. All of them are resurrected if you will and brought before the throne of judgment. In verse 12 And I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and books were opened.

All humanity stands before the throne. The world as we know it passes away. Now remember this is a metaphor but the world as we know it passes away.

There's this great white throne and in all of humanity everyone who's ever lived and breathed on this earth is gathered bodily before the throne.

[20 : 59] Now this scene is at once astonishingly global and yet intensely personal. Each person who's ever lived is gathered here.

It's the greatest gathering ever. Yet each person is judged personally according to what they have done.

Every rebellious thought is brought forward. Every arrogant attitude is brought forward. Every act of disobedience is brought forward. Every act of selfishness impatience anger and bitterness.

Jesus reminds us every careless word is remembered. And books were opened. No one's speaking.

[22 : 02] See that? No one's speaking. All have fallen silent beneath the judgment of God above. Now what do we say about this?

people often say Christians are just so judgmental. You know I go to a church and I just hear about judgment or I interact with my neighbor and I just hear about judgment.

And you know what? Sometimes we are. I know I am. I don't want to be but I am. We can be so self-righteous and all too quick to offer our critique of everyone and everything.

I'll never forget after I became a Christian I had this faithful conversation with my older brother. father. I was perhaps overzealous but sitting in the lawn over at the Biltmore estate talking I began to adjust him for his life.

I began to talk very bluntly about his girlfriend who was in my words worthless and began to press him on a number of issues.

[23 : 45] I mean top ten conversations I most regret in my life this one's in there maybe top five I'll spare you the rest but it's so humbling because it assumes that I made myself clean before I came to Christ.

And so we can't be like that. The first word that unbelievers hear about us ought not be word spoken in self righteousness and hypocrisy criticism and judgment.

Honestly right now it gets more convoluted with politics and everybody wants to issue their opinion on all things political. Okay we've done our civic duty we voted in November we participated and supported on January 20.

Let's move on. Okay? and let's get back to what we're all about. You know we don't judge the world. We don't judge unbelievers and perhaps the greatest danger of our self righteousness and hypocrisy that presents to us is it eliminates the chance for us to warn others genuinely of the final judgment that is coming.

[25 : 15] You know in many ways I feel like it's kind of like the boy that cried wolf we say stop that stop that stop that stop that and they grow deaf for the judgment that's coming.

Let's not let that happen. Reform is worthless. The warning that must be spoken is the warning of the coming judgment that must be heard. There's a message that we're to proclaim.

It's not moral renovation. There's a message that we must proclaim and it is this there is a God on high who's offended because his glory has been trampled underfoot and every eye will see him. Every person will stand before him and there's still time to escape. That's our that's our message. That's the prophetic message.

That's the prophetic message because that's the message that will definitely become true if you're not a follower of Christ. Don't be duped.

[26 : 16] Don't believe it's not coming. Death is a thief. Don't wait until it's too late. Today is the day of salvation if you will but hear. Judgment is coming and your sins have stained you with real guilt before the holy God and your guilt is deserving of his real furious wrath but there is time there's time if you will but hide in Jesus' wounds.

I urge that you come this morning. The final judgment will separate believers from those who refuse to believe.

all who refuse will be thrown into the lake of fire to experience eternal conscious torment and then death will finally die.

This is the second death is what it says. Look in verse 14. It says then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death the lake of fire.

And for believers the reality of this judgment should instill in us a deep abiding fear of God and an irrepressible thankfulness for grace.

[27 : 51] Point three the new heavens and new earth. This third vision unfolds the most breathtaking vision in all of scripture.

the new heavens and the new earth. Look at me in verses 1 through 4. He says then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more and I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death will be no more neither shall there be mourning!

crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away everything's new new heaven new earth new Jerusalem I make all things new now what does that mean right does that mean all the earth as we know it passes away is God simply replacing the world with a whole new world is he kind of flushing one down the proverbial commode and creating a new world that's a that's a big question I don't know that I want to answer it fully right now but the main point I'm not going to answer it fully right now there I'll commit something the main point is the new heavens new earth will be a material world that's what he's trying to say it's a material world we won't float away on clouds playing harps praise the

Lord nor will we be spirits that walk through walls or something like that life will be solid tangible tactile it'll be with all the senses that we now know it'll be things that we can feel and touch and do we'll have new bodies which will be nice but life in the new heavens and new earth will be much like life now except made new now think about that we'll work though not for the man you know nor for the weekend either but we'll work because we created to work created to enjoy work and enjoy it unto the Lord we'll eat imagine that well sorry see my passions ah we'll sleep we'll sing we'll read we'll run we'll fellowship some of you won't run that's okay we'll run we'll fellowship we'll worship we'll do so many other things we'll do life just like we know it without the hindrances of sin gone will be everything that haunted us and pain us everything that kept us up in the middle of the night everything that pushed us down beginning of the morning these verses are wonderfully couched in negation in nose as if to remind us that every single trace of sin and evil and pain will be chased away no tears no death no mourning no crying don't you ready to stop crying no pain no more Patriot Super Bowl no more Tom Brady you know jeez sweetest of all the Lord will be there the Lord will be there after those first new new new and no no no there's these wonderful metaphors that communicate this the new Jerusalem look at that I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven this is we're back from the great exile Babylon has been thrown down we're never going back never we're coming to the new Jerusalem into the city of God and she comes down prepared like a bride oh that's pregnant with meaning in and through this this this well the whole Bible but also through the revelation the prostitute Babylon has been thrown down the bride the church has been cleaned up all her filth her sin and shame have been washed away she's made beautiful again all the world's going to finally see how incredibly beautiful the church is and she's not just to look at she's created for a husband and then the loud voice says behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their

[33 : 51] God this is what all the metaphor means this is what all the scriptures have been pointing forward to God and his people finally together forever they are one just as Jesus prayed that they would be one in John 17 no more barriers no more obstacles no more separation in the new Jerusalem God forever dwells without barrier and the new Jerusalem the bride forever dwells with the husband without any distance paradise that was lost is restored I love it's virtually silent in all of the revelation scholars argue about how many times the Lord actually speaks in the revelation but he definitely speaks in verse six when he says it is done it is finished is what concludes the work on the cross it is done which concludes the work in the new heavens and new earth all that was planned has been accomplished and the people are with the

Lord forever and ever amen but if that wasn't enough tucked away in verse seven it concludes with these mind bending words the one who conquers will have this heritage and I will be his God and he will be my son now what's that mean he'll be my son what about a daughter I have a daughter what about a daughter as wonderful it is that we're his people God's saying something else here we're not merely his people we're something else one of the more interesting articles I've read in the past years about a boy that wrote a letter to the president now you probably or by now you've likely seen the picture of the young boy from Aleppo the five year old boy pulled from the wreckage of the airstrikes that one picture alerted the world to the trouble in a way like no media headline

could do social media exploded nations responded leaders responded parents everywhere looked into that boy's eyes wonder what it would feel like if that boy was their boy they saw him covered in filth and one six year old boy wrote a letter to the president with these words he says dear president Obama remember the boy who was picked up by the ambulance in Syria could you please go get him and bring him to my home park in the driveway or on the street and we'll be waiting for you guys with flags flowers and balloons we'll give him a family he'll be our brother Catherine my little sister will be collecting butterflies and fireflies for him in my school I have a friend from Syria Omar I'll introduce him to Omar we'll play together we can invite him to birthday parties and he'll teach us another language we'll teach him English too just like my friend from Japan please tell him that his brother will be Alex he's a very kind boy just like him since he won't bring toys Catherine will bring will share her big blue stripy white bunny I love that he offers his sisters toys it's good lead out and I'll share my bike and he can smell Catherine's lip gloss penguin which is green but she doesn't let anyone touch it thank you very much I can't wait for you to come we'll give him a family and he'll be our brother you know as poignant as those words are to President Obama these words are all the more poignant than God the Father the one who conquers will have this heritage I'll be his God he'll be my son God says as it were would you come to me I'll give you a family I'll make you my son these words take us all the way back to King David where God promised David that he would have a son who would reign forever on the throne of David to Samuel 7 14 but this king wouldn't merely be David's son he would be the son of God and so a thousand years later the one who would come from David's line and sit on the throne of David to reign forever is none other than Jesus Christ the son of God but here the Bible is taking us one step further to say that all who conquer will be sons of God all believers come sons scripture repeatedly says this in Christ you're all sons of God by faith is this a misprint no not children not sons and daughters but sons now ladies before you get offended remember the men are called the bride we got to get around that too what's going on it's far from being primitive or chauvinistic the Bible is trying to make it as clear as possible that all

[40 : 11] Christians are given the status of the son himself that all Christians regardless of their gender and age or socioeconomic level are given the status of the son himself and if you're his son you're as acceptable to God as Jesus Christ and if you are his son then you have the same access to God as Jesus Christ and this is your heritage this changes everything this is who you are beneath everything every label every way in which you define yourself beneath it all you are a son now think about this this is incredible while we rejoice at escaping the judgment of God and the conclusion of Revelation 20 we rejoice all the more at the adoption of God in Revelation 21 whereas the judgment of God leaves us thinking about cold transactions in the courtroom adoption ushers into the warmth and the closeness and the love of a family what's better than

God the just is satisfied God the father has invited all to come as sons Edward Fisher wrote these words in his incredible book the marrow of modern divinity he writes this says God the father at Jesus baptism is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased whereupon the Luther that means Martin Luther says in another place we are not to think and persuade ourselves that this voice came from heaven for Christ's own sake but for our sakes the truth is Christ had no need that it should be said unto him this is my beloved son why he knew from knew that from all eternity therefore by these words

God the father in Christ his son cheers the hearts of poor sinners and greatly delights them with singular comfort and heavenly sweetness assuring them that whosoever is married unto Christ and so in him by faith he is as acceptable to God the father as Christ himself he continues wherefore if you would be acceptable to God and be made his dear child then by faith cleave unto his beloved son Christ and hang about his neck now this is puritan language so just hold on yea and creep into his bosom and so shall the love and favor of God be as deeply insinuated into you as it is into Christ himself so shall God the father together with his beloved son wholly possess you and be possessed of you you are his son you know it in part one day you'll know it perfectly this is our hope let's hold each other to it the end is at hand let's not shrink back let's press on let's remember well let's not waste our life let's overcome father in heaven thank you for these things and thank you most of all for your mercy lord I pray that you would press that hope into our hearts and minds and cause us to be shaped deeply lord lord we thank you for our eternal security as we look to the final judgment and the pouring out of the wrath we deserve we thank you that we will pass through that death as well and fly into your presence to worship you to live with you to fellowship with you forever oh god

cause us to think of this often and to live for this always we thank you in christ's name amen you've been listening to a message given by walt alexander lead pastor of trinity grace church in athens senessee for more information about trinity grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com